Shakespeare

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Shakespeare

Gabriel Egan

Edinburgh University Press

This book is dedicated to my graduate students in the 2006–7 cohort of the degrees 'MA Texts in Performance' and 'MA Early Modern Writing' at Loughborough University, upon whom its ideas were first tested and, in the light of their wise critiques, thoroughly revised.

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Series Preface

The study of English literature in the early twenty-first century is host to an exhilarating range of critical approaches, theories and historical perspectives. 'English' ranges from traditional modes of study such as Shakespeare and Romanticism to popular interest in national and area literatures such as the United States, Ireland and the Caribbean. The subject also spans a diverse array of genres from tragedy to cyberpunk, incorporates such hybrid fields of study as Asian American literature, Black British literature, creative writing and literary adaptations, and remains eclectic in its methodology.

Such diversity is cause for both celebration and consternation. English is varied enough to promise enrichment and enjoyment for all kinds of readers and to challenge preconceptions about what the study of literature might involve. But how are readers to navigate their way through such literary and cultural diversity? And how are students to make sense of the various literary categories and periodisations, such as modernism and the Renaissance, or the proliferating theories of literature, from feminism and marxism to queer theory and ecocriticism? The Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature series reflects the challenges and pluralities of English today, but at the same time it offers readers clear and accessible routes through the texts, contexts, genres, historical periods and debates within the subject.

Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley

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The Department of English and Drama at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom has provided an ideal environment in which to teach and research and I am grateful to my colleagues, and especially to my heads of department Nigel Wood and Elaine Hobby, for creating these conditions. This book was typed by its author on an AlphaGrip keyboard, which allows the hands to rest comfortably in the lap (www.alphagrip.com). I have no connection with this company, but I am grateful to its president Michael Willner for his remarkable invention.

Chronology

Items marked * are defined in more detail in the Glossary

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
54 BCE	Julius Caesar invades Britain and establishes Roman presence	
54 BCE–410 CE	Roman Empire controls Britain	Open-air amphitheatres built for public entertainment
410 CE	Roman Emperor Honorius unable to defend Britain from Pictish and Saxon attacks. Roman rule in Britain effectively ended	
410 CE–1575	The one thousand years commonly (but misleadingly) known as the Middle Ages (= 'medieval' in Latin) or the Dark Ages	No purpose-built theatres constructed
1450		Johannes Gutenberg perfects printing with movable type

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
1477		William Caxton establishes a printing press in London
1543	Nicolaus Copernicus presents the heliocentric model of the solar system	
1558	Protestant Queen Elizabeth succeeds Catholic Queen Mary as monarch of England. (Scotland is a separate monarchy.) Joan Shakespeare, Shakespeare's elder sister, born	
1559–74		Monarch and privy council increasingly intervene in the semi-professional acting companies, enforcing aristocratic patronage and squeezing out the smaller and less well-capitalised troupes
1559–60	Joan Shakespeare I, Shakespeare's elder sister, dies	
1562	Margaret Shakespeare, Shakespeare's elder sister born	
1563	Margaret Shakespeare, Shakespeare's elder sister dies	
1564	Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe born	
1566	Gilbert Shakespeare, William's younger brother, born	
1569	Joan Shakespeare II, Shakespeare's younger sister, born	

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
1571	Anne Shakespeare, William's younger sister, born	
1574	Richard Shakespeare, William's younger brother, born	* James Burbage and others form the Leicester's men company
1579	Anne Shakespeare, William's younger sister, dies	
1576		* James Burbage erects the first purpose-built playhouse, called The Theatre, in Shoreditch. Companies of child actors begin to offer performances at St Paul's school and a building in the Blackfriars district
1580	Edmund Shakespeare, William's youngest brother (and later an actor in London) born	
1582	Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway	
1583	Shakespeare's daughter Susanna born	* The privy council forms a playing company called the Queen's men from the best actors in all the companies, and they are sent to tour the country

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
1584		Child actors ceased performing at Blackfriars
1585	Shakespeare's son Hamnet and daughter Judith (twins) born	
1586–90		Shakespeare goes to London and enters its literary/theatrical culture
1587		* Philip Henslowe builds The Rose playhouse on Bankside
1587–93		* Marlowe's plays for the Admiral's men at The Rose establish blank verse drama as a highly successful commercial form
1588	Spanish Armada defeated	
1589	Galileo demonstrates falsity of Aristotelian mechanics by showing that different weights dropped from the Tower at Pisa accelerate at the same rate	
1590–1		Shakespeare's first four plays, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Contention of York and Lancaster* (later renamed *2 Henry 6*),

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		Richard Duke of York (later renamed *3 Henry 6*) are performed. Child actors cease offering performances at St Paul's school
1592		Shakespeare is attacked as an upstart dramatist in the pamphlet *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*. Philip Henslowe makes major alterations at The Rose, putting a cover over the stage and enlarging the yard
1593	Marlowe dies	Shakespeare's long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* published
1592–3		Shakespeare's first Roman play, *Titus Andronicus* (co-written with George Peele) is performed, as are a prequel, *1 Henry 6*, and a sequel, *Richard 3*, to his York/Lancaster plays
1594		* The privy council limits London playing to two

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		companies, the Admiral's men at The Rose and the Chamberlain's men at The Theatre. Shakespeare becomes a sharer, actor, and main dramatist for the Chamberlain's men. His *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost* first performed. Shakespeare's first printed play, *Titus Andronicus*, is published without his name on the title-page; this indicates his works' popularity. (Later printed plays follow – with his name on them from 1598 – so that half his plays are in print by the time of his death in 1616.) Shakespeare's long narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* is published
1595		Francis Langley builds The Swan playhouse upstream from

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		Henslowe's Rose and as a rival to it
1595–6		Shakespeare's *Richard 2*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *1 Henry 4* first performed
1596	Shakespeare pays for a coat of arms to establish his family's gentility. His son Hamnet dies	* James Burbage converts a building in the Blackfriars district to an indoor playhouse but is prevented from using it by a residents' petition. It is used part-time by companies of child actors
1597–8		Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *2 Henry 4*, *Much Ado about Nothing* first performed
1597	Shakespeare buys a large, expensive house known as New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon	
1598		Shakespeare's plays start to be published with his name on the title-page, indicating that he is attracting a

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		readership as well as a theatrical following
1599	Lord Essex returns from Ireland having failed to put down a rebellion in the colony	* James Burbage's The Theatre in Shoreditch is dismantled and reconstructed on Bankside, next to Henslowe's Rose, as The Globe. Shakespeare's *Henry 5* and *Julius Caesar* first performed
1600–1		Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night* first performed. Lord Essex's supporters pay for a private performance of Shakespeare's *Richard 2* the day before their unsuccessful uprising in London. Henslowe builds the square open-air playhouse called The Fortune north of the river
1602–3		Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure* first performed
1603	Protestant Queen Elizabeth dies and is succeeded on the	* Shakespeare's company get royal

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
	throne of England by King James 6 of Scotland, who becomes James 1 of England and rules both monarchies	patronage and changes its name from the Chamberlain's men to the King's men
1604–5		Shakespeare's *Othello*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Timon of Athens* (co-written with Thomas Middleton), and *King Lear* first performed. The King's men play Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Henry 5*, and *The Merchant of Venice* at court
1605	Catholic conspiracy to blow up parliament, and the king with it, the Gunpowder Plot, is narrowly thwarted	
1606		Parliament passes An Act to Restrain the Abuses of Players censoring the use of religious swear words on the stage
1606–7	Edmund Shakespeare, William's youngest brother and an actor in London, dies	Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Pericles* (co-written

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		with George Wilkins and the biggest hit of Shakespeare's career) first performed. The King's men play Shakespeare's *King Lear* at court
1608		* The child actors at the Blackfriars are closed down and the King's men take it over as a winter venue, continuing to use the Globe in the summer. Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is first performed
1609		Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, many of them highly homoerotic, are published
1609–10	Galileo's telescope finds new heavenly bodies and shows imperfections across the solar system	Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* first performed
1611		Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is first performed. The King's men play Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* at court

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
1612–13	Gilbert and Richard Shakespeare, William's younger brothers, die	Shakespeare *Cardenio* (co-written with John Fletcher and since lost) is first performed. The King's men play Shakespeare's *Cardenio*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *1 Henry 4*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Tempest* at court
1613–14		Shakespeare's *All Is True* (co-written with John Fletcher and later renamed *Henry 8*), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (co-written with John Fletcher) are first performed. The Globe is burnt down during one of the first performances of *All Is True* and is immediately rebuilt, fairer than before, by the players
1616	Shakespeare dies and is buried in Stratford-upon-Avon	
1618		The King's men play Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and

Date	Historical and biographical events	Theatrical and literary events
		The Winter's Tale at court
1619		The King's men play Shakespeare's *Pericles* at court
1623		The first complete works of Shakespeare, known as the *First Folio*, is published as an act of commemoration by his fellow actors in the King's men. Anne Hathaway dies. The King's men play Shakespeare's *Pericles* at court

Introduction

Four hundred years ago Shakespeare wrote plays for performance and today we read them. In the eighteenth century, the poet Alexander Pope popularised the idea that Shakespeare 'grew immortal in his despite',[1] meaning that he could not have anticipated that for centuries after he wrote them his plays would be read, for Shakespeare saw no further than getting them into performance at the theatres where he worked. Since the mid-twentieth century especially, the idea that Shakespeare is not for reading but for performing has taken an increasing hold on the minds of playgoers, researchers, actors, and students. The stage, not the page, is where Shakespeare is now commonly supposed to come alive. On the assumption that Shakespeare had no interest in getting his plays into print, a stage-centred approach has achieved critical dominance.

We are currently experiencing what might well be the high-water mark of this stage-centred thinking about Shakespeare, with the replica Globe playhouse in London having popularised a notion that putting the plays into an approximation of their original performance context is likely to produce insights unavailable when they are merely read or are performed in theatres unlike those for which they were written. Challenging this view is a very recently-emerged argument that, contrary to the myth begun by Pope, Shakespeare had an eye to early readers of his books and indeed was a self-consciously literary writer with an interest in print publication.[2]

The tension between these two views of Shakespeare will be a recurrent theme in this book, because despite the success of the stage-centred view most of us still experience Shakespeare as readers more thoroughly and frequently than we encounter him in performance, even if we accept the current orthodoxy that the latter is the plays' proper mode of consumption.

The main chapters of the book will approach the texts in an interrogative mode, with the following questions being returned to repeatedly:

- **What has changed since Shakespeare's time?** We will consider various historicising projects, meaning the attempts to recreate the original performance contexts. Whether or not we accept the particular attempts to historicise Shakespeare, it is clear that habits of thought have changed substantially since his time, and here we will in particular consider the changes in attitudes towards sexual practices, race, the subordination of women, and the governance of countries.
- **To what uses has Shakespeare been put?** By considering the potential for different choices to be made by performers of Shakespeare, we will see how the scripts as we have them can be turned to wildly differing purposes. It is extraordinary but true that such implacable enemies as Nazi propaganda minister Josef Goebbels and Marxist dramatist and producer Bertolt Brecht could each find in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608) an echo of his own political opinions. Once we jettison the mistaken idea that Shakespeare's work have an immanent meaning that our investigations should seek to recover, we can develop the much more interesting possibility of treating 'meaning' as a verb rather than a noun, and explore the idea that meaning emerges from what we do with Shakespeare in the classroom and in the theatre.
- **What value is in Shakespeare?** This addresses the central question of why we study Shakespeare at all. If, as historicists will argue, Shakespeare is utterly of his own time and cultural place, it is hard to see why his works, rather than, say, locally-produced literature, should be studied at once in California, Cambridge, and Calcutta. On the other hand lies the idea (now unfashionable) that Shakespeare's works embody truths that do

not change over time and that apply in all cultures, so that in studying them we study ideas that always have been and always will be relevant to human concerns. To reconcile these positions we could argue since it is a predominating feature of international artistic and educational culture, the Shakespeare canon simply must be tackled, as George Mallory said of climbing Everest, because it is there. That is, we could take the importance of Shakespeare to be not the inherent value in the works but the value that societies have, over the past 400 years, attached to the works. Such an approach might allow our interpretations to slip free of simply being 'for' or 'against' Shakespeare and enable more subtle engagements that open up rather than close down debates about Shakespeare's relevance in the modern world.

These questions will structure the book's interrogations, but the chapters themselves will be ordered into two parts, the first concerning dramatic genres and the second concerning particular critical approaches.

In Part I, matters of genre will be outlined via readings of two comedies, two histories, two tragedies, a 'problem' play and a romance, and then in Part II a selection of critical approaches will be explained and explored using further readings of plays that are not easily categorised: an historical tragedy, a late Romance, and two more problem plays. Ordering Part I by genre follows the lead offered by the first complete works of Shakespeare, the 1623 First Folio, and provides a convenient means to distinguish the lineaments of dramatic construction in the period. The comedies and tragedies, for example, exist essentially as individual stories that might be tied to particular mythical or historical events (say, the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta or the assassination of Julius Caesar) but were related to the Elizabethan present only by analogy. One might, for example, decide that Caesar's story warns against the pre-emptive removal of a would-be tyrant. The English history plays, on the other hand, were necessarily embedded in a turbulent and fairly recent past that, looked at from one angle, illustrated the operation of divine providence in human affairs. Dramatising the conflicts that gave rise to the Tudor dynasty was necessarily less an exercise in analogy and allusion than an open matter of politics and ideology.

By keeping the genres apart for the sake of this argument it will become apparent that the texts themselves exert pressure on these distinctions. Comedy is often thought a lightweight genre, concerned only with love and harmless misunderstandings, but as we shall see it can treat weighty matters too. Jonathan Dollimore's book *Radical Tragedy* (1984) showed that in the tragic mode were presented disturbing philosophical and political matters, but we could also speak of radical comedy for it too could destabilise cherished notions of what it means to be human. This book's organisation of materials aims to help readers to go beyond a merely functional sense of criticism as a set of independent toolkits with which one might take apart an artistic work like one takes apart a machine, and to develop the sense that criticism is conditioned by how one views the world. Each chapter is supported with a list of references from which the ideas have been drawn, and there are additional, more broad-ranging, lists at the end of the book together with advice on the use of tools for finding other secondary materials.

Part I, on dramatic genres, begins with a chapter on the comedies *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and *Much Ado about Nothing* (1598). We shall consider the means by which we now, and the audiences back then, might determine the genre of a play from its events. The poet Byron gave a simple rule about genre based on whether marriage or death is the outcome, but we must also factor in the complication brought about by the invention of a mixed mode called tragicomedy around 1600. In relation to the big questions listed above, it is clear that in respect of these two plays the ideas that commonly circulate now about sex and about the relation of nature to nurture are fundamentally different from the ones circulating in Shakespeare's time. The chapter will consider what differences these changes entail for criticism of the plays.

Chapter 2 discusses the history plays *Richard 2* (1595) and *Henry 5* (1599). Shakespeare's two tetralogies, as his four-play cycles are called, were written out of historical sequence: those concerning the later reigns were written first. The Shakespeare history plays tell a version of English history that has appealed to patriots for their apparent valorisation of the country, but as we shall see the versions of Englishness and Britishness constructed by the plays

are contestable. In one reading of the plays, the entire eight-play sequence amounts to a single epic work that shows the standard Christian pattern of a Fall followed by a period of misery (which is God's punishment for the Fall) that ends with Redemption. This is a providential reading and, since the Redemption coincides with the succession of the first Tudor king, Henry 7, it is sometimes called the Tudor Myth.

An alternative to this providentialist reading might see the plays as showing how particular human actions, and not the hand of God, shape the events of history. For this approach, the works of the Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) are central and we will consider differing opinions about his impact on contemporary thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In trying to choose between these readings, the fact that Shakespeare first wrote the plays about the later reigns is crucially important, for it strengthens certain patterns that we may want to find in the full eight-play cycle, and weakens others. Shakespeare's play *Henry 5* will be given special consideration because it contains highly problematic material that has to be suppressed if it is to be used (as it was more than once in the twentieth century) as a simple story of English patriotic heroism. To conclude that chapter, we will compare the first printing of the play – the so-called 'bad' quarto of 1600 – with the more familiar version in order to show that the choice of versions one prefers is essentially conditioned by one's critical approach to the material.

After comedy and history, we turn in Chapter 3 to tragedy. Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists had produced tragic heroes whose likeability defied the simple characterisation that 'when the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good', as Thomas Middleton's creation Vindici put it in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606–7). But none was as complexly admirable as Shakespeare's Hamlet and Othello, roles that today's young actors often consider to be career high-points and which in film attract international stars such as, recently, Ethan Hawke and Laurence Fishburne. As a pair, the student and the soldier can usefully be taken together because their narratives are concerned with how they behave outside of the institutions that each claims has shaped him: the university and the army. Hamlet's confrontations with the machinations of real power

politics and with a ghost whose nature Hamlet's (deliberately anachronistic) Lutheran education makes hard to comprehend are played out as a series of struggles between ideals and hard facts, between faiths (of various kinds) and empiricisms.

Famously working on a number of levels at once – ghost story, doomed romance, political thriller – the play *Hamlet* (1600–1) is intensely philosophical and it is to this characteristic that the reading offered here will first attend. Linking *Hamlet* to *Othello* (1603–4) is the theme of psychological disturbance as an effect of external pressures, and the question of whether predisposition plays an important part in a character's response to those pressures. Othello is markedly a racial outsider in Venetian society, and an old strand of criticism from the nineteenth century explained the tragic events in terms of that condition. This approach will be reconsidered and put in juxtaposition with recent theorising about the experiences of cultural and racial separation and intermingling. What emerges are some reasons to take seriously a mode of character criticism that is now largely discredited in academic study of the plays and yet is necessarily the starting point for all theatrical work since actors have the task of presenting human personalities.

Part I, on genres, ends with consideration of the so-called 'problem' play *All's Well that Ends Well* (1604–5) and the Romance of *The Winter's Tale* (1609). It is almost a universal rule in Shakespeare – and indeed in Western drama generally – that freely-chosen marriage is presented as right and natural and that the threat of imposed marriage upon the unwilling produces misery that can, for example in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), generate tragedy. An exception, however, is *All's Well that Ends Well* in which Bertram's reluctance to accept his imposed marriage to Helen is represented as immature peevishness. Many have responded to the play's failure, or refusal, to show Bertram developing into a man worthy of the wife imposed upon him, and its ending is usually characterised as problematic because lacking in the necessary closure of either comedy or tragedy. *The Winter's Tale* too is difficult to categorise, for although it ends happily enough there is an uncomfortable strand of almost casual violence (for example the killing and eating of Antigonus) and recurrent irrational rage (Leontes' sexual jealousy and Polixenes' sundering of his son's

marriage) that spoil the pleasure. That these plays might be experiments in testing the generic boundaries of drama will be considered in this chapter.

In Part II of this book, the attention shifts to critical approaches. It has long been suspected that *Measure for Measure* (1603) as we have it – the earliest text being the 1623 Folio – was not written by Shakespeare alone, and this provides the subject for Chapter 5. There are dramatic awkwardnesses, strange repetitions, and decidedly untopical references (to do with war in Hungary) that are hard to reconcile with the idea that the play as we have it represents the play as it left Shakespeare's hand in 1603. The likeliest explanation of these matters is that after Shakespeare's death, but before the printing of the 1623 Folio, Middleton adapted the play for a revival. By historicising the textual condition, we can say more on the vexed subject of how far the play is rooted in its first performative context and how far we can bring to bear historical work regarding attitudes to sex, religion, and government in Shakespeare's time. What emerges from historical work is the need for a more complex set of notions about the author and the author's agency than are usually brought to bear on Shakespeare's work.

Like *Measure for Measure*, the only authoritative version of *Macbeth*, the subject of Chapter 6, is one adapted by Middleton after Shakespeare finished with it. Our concern here will be with performance, and in this case we are lucky to have additional evidence in the form of an eyewitness account of the play in performance in 1611 written by a doctor called Simon Forman. What emerges from a consideration of the performativity of the script is that the women called witches are deliberately of an ambiguous nature. In this chapter we will pay close attention to the timing of exits and entrances and to the use of particular stage doors to represent particular off-stage locations, revealing the play's subtle exploitations of the practical necessities of the early-modern stage.

Turning to *The Tempest* (1611) in Chapter 7, a familiar pattern is repeated: when one reads the play it is not clear how human Caliban is supposed to be and only performance 'fixes' this. At the end of the play, Prospero says of Caliban 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine'. This might be taken as an admission that his slave is not merely his possession but has become, or perhaps always

was, a part of himself. Thus in the Hollywood science-fiction adaptation of the play called *Forbidden Planet* (1956) the Caliban figure is a reified monster from Prospero's *id*.[3] Prospero's identification with Caliban is of particular interest in relation to postcolonial theories of literature that explore how colonisers set out to construct strict categorical distinctions between themselves and those whose lands they colonise ('them' and 'us', 'slave' and 'master', 'savage' and 'civilised') and yet repeatedly find themselves unable to maintain these distinctions.

Our concern here will be identities, and in recent years the postcolonial readings have predominated, with the primary context being the reality that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans travelled overseas and established the bases of oppressive empires. In relating this historical fact to the play, a postcolonial reading of *The Tempest* achieves its best purchase on the dramatic matter if we are prepared to accept certain contestable premises, for example that Caliban is a 'native' of the island and Prospero an empire builder. (In fact both are there because they were cast out of somewhere else.) On the other hand, the play is clearly concerned with Europeans meeting those they find alien and strange, and it shows the kind of subordination of natives that actually happened to the millions of victims of colonialism. One of the most effective devices of colonialism was to generate a hierarchy within the colonised people, and as we shall see it is possible to read Ariel and Caliban as subordinates differentiated in just this way.

The final chapter considers materialism and takes *Timon of Athens* as its text. Idealism and materialism are precise philosophical terms with meanings quite unlike their non-specialist ones of 'assuming or wanting the best of things' and 'being acquisitive of goods'. We begin with definitions of these terms and with Plato's influential claim that ideas are real and not dependent upon the everyday world. Karl Marx's materialism was a direct rejection of such idealism, and in asking questions about how ideas arise from material social practices, he continued a longstanding tradition of enquiry whose origins can be discerned in seventeenth-century political philosophy. Timon turns misanthropic and attempts to evade all social contacts, but repeatedly he fails to remain asocial and interconnectedness – with other people, with circuits of exchange,

and with wider principles of the cosmos – is forced upon him. For all that he would think himself apart, the realities of life impact upon him and shape his ideas. In the simple act of attempting to dig up a root to feed himself – the most basic kind of production – Timon is thrown into relations of dependency that he would prefer to abjure. The principles of cosmic connectedness and transformation discovered in the play make sense when understood in relation to recent ecological and ecocritical work, which is one of the ways that critical materialism may develop in the twenty-first century.

The conclusion will attempt to give readers a sense of how their own close engagements with the texts and with the theories that the texts have in part generated can help to make sense of the wider cultural phenomenon of Shakespeare criticism. It is hoped that a reader who begins the book looking for help in making sense of the plays and the criticism will, by the end, have received that help. Beyond that, the author hopes to encourage readers to consider their own critical engagements as part of an ongoing dialogue about the meanings and values in Shakespeare. Such engagements must, however, be grounded in knowledge of just what the plays of Shakespeare are and how they have been mediated to us as early twenty-first century readers. To begin laying the foundations on which the criticism is built, we will now turn to the early printings of Shakespeare's plays.

HOW SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS COME DOWN TO US

In Shakespeare's lifetime eighteen of his plays (about half) were printed in cheap single-volume editions called quartos, in this order with the date of printing in brackets:

Titus Andronicus (1594)
2 Henry 6 (1594)
3 Henry 6 (1595)
Richard 2 (1597)
Richard 3 (1597)
Romeo and Juliet (1597)
1 Henry 4 (1598)

Love's Labour's Lost (1598)
Henry 5 (1600)
2 Henry 4 (1600)
Much Ado about Nothing (1600)
A Midsummer Night's Dream (1600)
The Merchant of Venice (1600)
The Merry Wives of Windsor (1602)
Hamlet (1603)
King Lear (1608)
Troilus and Cressida (1609)
Pericles (1609)

The above is a list of the first editions, and many of these plays were republished in second and subsequent editions in Shakespeare's lifetime. If Shakespeare's popularity and reputation had ended when he died, this would be all that we would have. But in 1622, six years after his death, a new first-edition quarto, *Othello*, was published. In 1623, the first 'complete works' edition of Shakespeare appeared, the so-called First Folio, and it not only printed the nineteen plays already in print but also the other seventeen that had not yet appeared. With the addition of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, printed in quarto in 1634, the thirty-seven-play canon of Shakespeare was complete. There are a couple of plays in existence that Shakespeare may have written small parts of, but these thirty-seven are the core of his output. We know of at least one of his plays, *Cardenio*, that formerly existed but is now lost, and it is possible that there was also a play called *Love's Labour's Won* that has been lost.

You can see from the above list that there was a flurry of Shakespeare printing in the six years from 1594 to 1600, averaging more than two a year, and then a slowing down. These six years are when Shakespeare rapidly shot to fame and success as a dramatist: his playing company, the Chamberlain's men, was one of only two allowed to play in London. This company had a permanent home venue to appear in (The Theatre in Shoreditch and then The Globe on Bankside), and to judge from Shakespeare's personal life – buying a title and the second-largest house in his home town of Stratford-upon-Avon – he made a lot of money with them. It is important to realise that he made his reputation, and his money, in

the theatre: we have no reason to suppose that he was paid for the printings of his plays. In this period, print runs of books were limited to 1,500 copies of any one title and most people could not read, but 3,000 spectators could crowd into a playhouse to see one of Shakespeare's plays, or indeed one of his rivals', for the other London company, the Admiral's men, were wildly successful too.

Today we tend to think of books as relatively cheap, widespread, and popular, and to think of theatre as relatively expensive, elitist, and appealing to a minority, but in Shakespeare's time the exact opposite was the case. The way to reach a mass market was to put plays on in a theatre, not to have them published. And yet publishers did think it worthwhile printing about half Shakespeare's plays during his career, so there was money in that too. Indeed, as a cultured and literary man, Shakespeare may well have been concerned with the readers of his plays, and may even have written plays with readers in mind. But by no stretch of the imagination can we picture Shakespeare as what we would now call an author – a person whose income is primarily generated by book sales – rather, he was a playwright, an actor, and a shareowner in a playing company and in its theatres.

There was in this period no professional trade body, no union or association, for actors. Acting companies were what were called joint-stock endeavours, in which a group of (almost always) men, called sharers, came together, pooled their capital, and ran a business in which they each shared the costs and each took a share in the profits. This was not how most business was done in the London of Shakespeare's time. For most businesses and industries there was an organisation called a guild that controlled all that was done. Only members of a guild could carry out these regulated professions, and the guild controlled the rates of profit, the prices of goods bought and sold, the rates of pay that guild members gave to the labourers they hired, and the contracting of young men to be apprentices. In return, the guild would settle disputes between guild members and would provide welfare relief to members who got into financial trouble, or their wives and dependants if they died. Being in a guild provided security, but because of the regulations it was difficult to make great profits. Those outside the guild structure, the joint-stock companies of merchant adventurers, the East India company, and the

acting companies, could lose everything if their enterprises failed. On the other hand, if they succeeded there was no brake on the profits (as there was in guild-controlled businesses), and the most successful of them, such as Shakespeare, became extremely rich.

We must think of Shakespeare, then, as primarily a man of business, specifically the theatre business. Whatever else he may have wanted to achieve in his work, he wanted, or rather he needed, his playing company to succeed in the competitive world of a vibrant entertainment industry. The new London theatre industry that emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century built for itself new performance venues unlike any other buildings of the time: virtually circular wooden open-air amphitheatres in the Roman style. The first substantial open-air playhouse was The Theatre, built in 1576 by James Burbage (father of the famous actor Richard Burbage) in the Shoreditch district just north-east of the city and hence beyond the jurisdiction of the city authorities. The Theatre was the model for the open-air playhouses of the new industry that Shakespeare entered, and it was essentially copied in Philip Henslowe's Rose theatre (1587) and Francis Langley's Swan (1595), and its particularities were effectively reborn when it was transplanted to Bankside to form The Globe in 1599 and again when a second Globe was built on the foundations of the first after a fire in 1613.

In 1596 a Dutch humanist scholar, Johannes de Witt, visited The Swan and drew a picture of it that his friend and fellow classicist Aernout van Buchel copied; this copy survives and is reproduced on page 16. De Witt's sketch is the only surviving interior view of an open-air playhouse of the period and it shows a virtually round amphitheatre of between sixteen and twenty-four sides with a stage projecting into the yard surmounted by a stage cover supported on two pillars. A sketch of the outside of the Globe shows it to be about 100 feet across, and we may assume The Swan was about the same. De Witt described The Swan as the largest of the London playhouses of its day and wrote that it was made out of an aggregate of flint stones, a detail we must doubt given the construction practices of the day. The large wooden columns supporting the stage cover were painted like marble so cleverly as to deceive the eye, and perhaps the external rendering too was deceptive. The described

interior marbleisation, the circular shape, and the use of classical columns with ornate bases and capitals put the Swan in a neo-classicist tradition of design emerging at the end of the sixteenth century, despite the apparent Tudor bareness of the sketch.

The open-air amphitheatres were the only round buildings in London, and were the first purpose-built theatres for a thousand years. Their antecedent was not the Greek amphitheatre, which had a shallow bowl shape and one tier of seating sweeping upwards, but the Roman amphitheatre as exemplified in the Colosseum, which stacked one deck of galleries on top of another. Burbage named his playhouse of 1576 The Theatre presumably to make explicit its dependence on the classical model, as its round shape and stacked galleries implied. Foreign visitors got the point and repeatedly referred to the London theatres looking like Roman amphitheatres, and were impressed by the fake-marble interior decoration.

The theatrical venues, then, were of themselves a harking-back to a lost European culture that might be revived in synthesis with native Tudor materials and practices. To that extent, we should not be too wary of the term 'Renaissance', which begs no fewer questions than the historians' preferred term 'early modern'. However, for all their pretension to recover ancient ideals the theatre companies were also a competitive entertainment business, and (as with modern Hollywood television and cinema) whenever one of them hit upon a successful formula – say, the English history play genre or plays about magicians – the others would produce their own copies of it.

As Roslyn Lander Knutson showed, imitation was the usual approach to repertories:

> . . . similarities [between companies' repertories] arose from a principle of duplication. Companies repeated the subjects and formulas that had been successful in their own offerings and in the repertories of their competitors. This principle accounts for the proliferation of offerings on a popular hero; the growth of species of plays within the framework of each genre; the multiplication of a play into two, three, or even four parts; and the emergence of a minor character from one play to become the star in a sequel.[4]

Thus simple copying of another's company's repertory – their plays' heroes, themes, and titles – was the standard practice of an early modern playing company. Getting this historical context right is a prerequisite for critical engagement with the works, and a key concept in this book will be the power and flexibility of stage-centred thinking.

For the most part we do not know how the printed texts of Shakespeare that come to us – the various quartos and the First Folio – came into existence, beyond the obvious fact that a printer took an existing manuscript (or, in reprints, an existing book) of a Shakespeare play and set it in type to make a printed book. We would very much like to know where these manuscripts came from, but none have survived and the matter remains entirely speculative. Importantly, though, we know enough to say that they seem to be in some ways the 'leftovers' from theatrical performance: authorial papers at an early stage in the theatrical process, or a manuscript book used in the theatre to regulate a performance as it is happening, or the collected recollections of actors of what they spoke in their performances. With very few exceptions they do not seem to be manuscripts created for the pleasure of readers, so we are entitled to think of them as essentially scripts left behind after the performances, and thus to always refer back to the original performance context when trying to make sense of the plays.

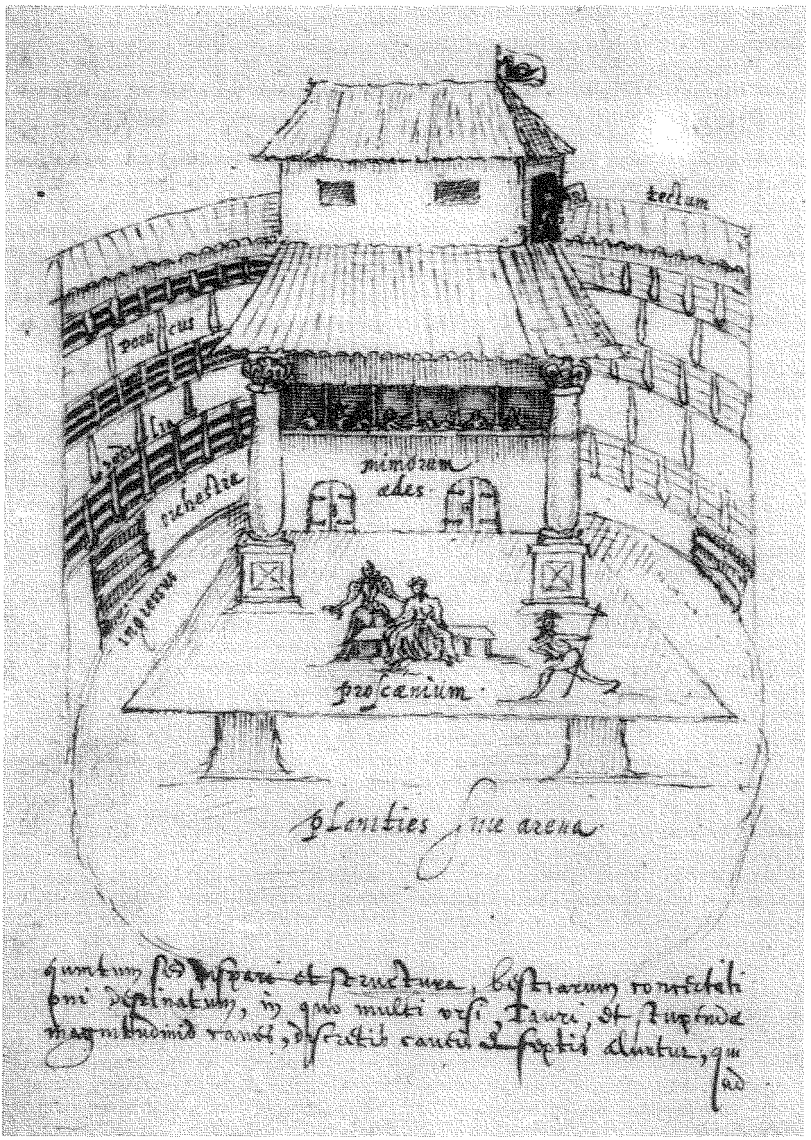
This is an example of what is meant by stage-centred thinking. A handy way to remember this is as the complete opposite of T. S. Eliot's suggestion that the thirty-seven plays of Shakespeare, taken together, comprise a single long poem. Contrary to Eliot's view – and he was, after all, a poet himself and biased towards the genre – the one thing Shakespeare's plays are not is pure poetry. One can stay stage-centred even while reading, and tips on how to do this will be provided.

NOTES

1. Alexander Pope, 'The First Epistle of the Second Book of Ovid, Imitated', quoted in Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary*

Dramatist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 78.

2. Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, p. 78.
3. Fred M. Wilcox, dir. *Forbidden Planet*, MGM, 1956.
4. Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594–1613* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), p. 40.



Johannes de Witt, sketch of inside of the Swan Theatre on Bankside, as copied by Aernout van Buchel, c. 1596.

Part I Dramatic Genres

CHAPTER 1

Comedies: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing*

Comedy has traditionally been treated as an inferior genre of early modern drama, its concerns being considered more trivial than those of tragedy and history. (Noticeably, until recently women almost never were permitted to edit the Shakespeare tragedies and histories, but were allowed free rein with the comedies.) A Shakespearian comedy ends with marriage and with parties that were in conflict (often parents and children) reconciled. These events are related: marriage is symbolic of a community's harmonious reintegration of its constituent members. To achieve this, however, it is often necessary to cast out of the community an evil figure who should never have been admitted into it.

The community's sense of itself is thus reinforced by the policing of its own borders, and in this casting out of the bad and reintegration of the good a kind of group healing can be said to have occurred. There is a psychological element to this process: the casting out of the bad, the alien, the does-not-belong, generates collective relief from anxiety about infiltration from without and thus a comedy can easily end with a communal dance of celebration. That is the theory at least. Rejecting the denigration of comedy, this chapter will read these two plays in relation to this foundational generic criterion – that comedies must end with a healing marriage – that the plays seem to uphold while slyly subverting.

In all the confused romantic crossings and recrossings in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it is easy to lose sight of the fact that Demetrius marries Helena (whom he loathed at the start of the play) only because the love potion applied to his eyes in the forest has not been removed; his love for her is not a natural state but the result of permanent transformation of his senses. Transformation is central to comedy because the community is supposed to be changed for the better at the end, but such change is generally conceived as a return to a former state of well-being. That the transformation at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* requires one character to remain under a spell subtly shifts the terms of the comic closure. Multiple transformations (or 'translations', as the play calls them) occur when the natural and supernatural worlds meet, but in their particulars these changes are much likened to the effects of drama itself.

There is no supernatural realm in *Much Ado about Nothing* and the same kinds of transformations (the all-hating Beatrice and Benedick fall in love) are generated by explicitly theatrical means: deceitful performances put on by their friends. When considered in relation to Greek New Comedy from which they derive, these plays test their audiences' and readers' sense that the outcomes untie constructed complications (denouement = untying) and remove artificial barriers to happiness; their solutions are at least as contrived as the problems they solve.

In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Stanley Wells noted that the plot ends at the close of the fourth act with the resolution of all the problems that have arisen, and that the play carries on through the fifth act with nothing further needing to be put right:

> By now all the complications of the plot are resolved. But the play is not over. From the start we have been kept aware that it is to culminate in marriage, celebration, and benediction. We know too that the tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe* has yet to be enacted. The impetus that carries us forward into the final scenes is that of expectation, not of plot tension.[1]

This premature resolution is not unique to this play: the final act of *The Merchant of Venice* has often been seen as something of a

redundant adjunct tacked onto the end of the trial scene. What is unusual is that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* most of the final act is taken up with a dramatic performance being presented to the play's protagonists.

It is possible to see the ring-trick in the last act of *The Merchant of Venice* as a kind of drama also, and the same can be said for the statue-trick in *The Winter's Tale*. These two quasi-theatrical events are staged by women in these two plays in order to bring about some kind of transformation of the male characters, and we can reasonably speak of a group of transformative quasi-dramatic events in the plays of Shakespeare. The example in *King Lear* of Edgar's trick of making his father think that he has fallen from a great height in order to restore Gloucester's will to live can be included in such a group. The mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* cannot be included in this group however; it does not serve to transform those for whom it is performed. A different purpose is being served by the mechanicals' play, and it is made very clear what that purpose is as we shall see. There are, however, other quasi-dramatic events in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and they do serve a transformative function.

TRANSFORMATION, TRANSLATION, AND PLAYS TO PASS THE TIME

The purpose of the mechanicals' play is to pleasantly pass the time between the marriage feast and the consummation that will take place at bedtime. Theseus says:

> THESEUS
> Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have
> To wear away this long age of three hours
> Between our after-supper and bed-time?
> Where is our usual manager of mirth?
> What revels are in hand? Is there no play
> To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
> (5.32–7)[2]

Theseus wants the 'long age', the 'torturing hours', to be worn away: he is desperate to get to bed and have sex with Hippolyta. The performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* would have to be very good indeed to keep Theseus's mind off his forthcoming enjoyment. As it turns out, the play does keep him occupied, but only because it amuses him to see something so awful.

To understand the extremity of anticipation that Theseus is in, we need only to look at the opening lines of the play:

> THESEUS
> Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
> Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
> Another moon – but O, methinks how slow
> This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires
> Like to a stepdame or a dowager
> Long withering out a young man's revenue.
> (1.1.1–6)

This statement of his frustration reveals, upon close analysis, that something very odd is being said. Theseus says that his impatience is like that felt by a young man who is to inherit from an aged female relative, but finds that she will not hurry up and die but instead lingers on and diminishes the expected fortune in supporting herself. It is disturbing that this image of looked-for death is evoked in the context of a looked-for marriage. Also, this simile suggests that Theseus's ardour wanes rather than grows as he waits for sex with Hyppolyta, else why the reference to diminution in the simile?

Theseus is not the only one who must accept deferred gratification in the play. Hermia's 'let us teach our trial patience' (1.1.152) and 'We must starve our sight | From lovers' food' (1.1.222–3) indicate that the young lovers are in the same predicament as the older couple. Worse still for them, there is no present end to the deferral because their problems have not been resolved. When suggesting a resolution, Lysander uses almost the same language as Theseus had, but inverted:

> LYSANDER
> I have a widow aunt, a dowager

Of great revenue, and she hath no child,
And she respects me as her only son.
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee
(1.1.157–61)

Notice Shakespeare's deliberate (unless we suppose very careless) reuse of the words 'dowager' and 'revenue' and of the idea of a young man inheriting from his aunt, which appeared earlier in Theseus's speech. Whereas Theseus thought about a young man whose wealth diminishes because the old woman will not hurry up and die, the reality of Lysander's situation is a young man whose fortunes are utterly made by the old aunt. Theseus thinks of diminishing ardour and declining fortunes, Lysander of rising fortunes and lawful consummation of his sexual desire for Hermia, once the impediment to their marriage (parental disapproval) is overcome. That is the common structure of this kind of comedy of youthful love derived from the Greek tradition.

The play thus begins with two pressing needs. Theseus needs the time to pass as quickly as possible, and both pairs of young lovers need some kind of transformation to take place so that they can achieve the gratification of which Theseus is assured. The latter need is fulfilled by the events that take place throughout the night in the forest, during which fairies interfere in human affairs in a way that adjusts human perception and resolves conflicts of love. The main agent of this transformation is Robin Goodfellow who applies the love-potion but also creates quasi-dramatic events that deceive the humans and so aid the resolution.

Robin boasts of his power to interfere with human perception and so make mortals do as he wishes when he describes how he frightened the mechanicals away from their rehearsal:

[ROBIN]
And at our stamp here o'er and o'er one falls.
He 'Murder' cries, and help from Athens calls.
Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
Made senseless things begin to do them wrong.
For briers and thorns at their apparel snatch;

Some sleeves, some hats from yielders all things catch.
I led them on in this distracted fear
(3.2.25–31)

With a combination of love-potion and the power to trick the human sense, Robin Goodfellow and Oberon are able to manipulate events in the forest.

It would be a mistake, however, to see these fairies as operating from an objective perspective and employing omniscient powers. What is striking is that the fairies themselves misinterpret much of what they see of human demeanour and behaviour. The simplest example is of course Robin's mistaking Lysander for Demetrius and applying the love-potion to the wrong Athenian's eyes. Less obvious, and more significant, is Robin's misreading of human motivations. Upon seeing Hermia and Lysander, and mistaking them for Helena and Demetrius, Robin reasons that Hermia imposed their physical separation because 'she durst not lie | Near this lack-love' (2.2.82–3). We know that Hermia had insisted upon the distance between herself and Lysander for the sake of modesty. Robin, however, reads the scene in the light of what he has been told by Oberon – an Athenian youth disdains a woman who loves him – and the reality of a loving but modest couple fits the facts just as well as the unhappy couple would.

The most important fairy misreading is not directly significant to the plot and may easily be passed over if one is not looking for it. Still confused about the Athenian lovers, Oberon witnesses Demetrius's pursuit of Hermia and interprets it thus:

OBERON (*to Robin*)
What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite,
And laid the love juice on some true love's sight.
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turned, and not a false turned true.
(3.2.88–91)

It is true that Robin has laid the potion on the wrong eyes, but that has nothing to do with this pair for Demetrius has been pursuing Hermia like this since the beginning of the play. The real affairs

of mortals, such as Demetrius's unrequited love for Hermia or Lysander and Hermia's modesty, seem to the fairies to be possible only by enchantment or hatred.

This rather suggests that the love-potion exerts a force – the power to love unreasonably – that already exists in the mortal world. It is not that the world of the fairies is another dimension, a paranormal and parallel world that observes the everyday world omnisciently, but rather that the fairy world is a different world also constrained by the limits of perception and equally subject to mistaken purpose and misrecognition. The actions of the fairies certainly bring about a resolution of the lovers' problems, but the means, the potion, is exactly like forces that are already in operation. When Lysander is in love with Helena because his eyes have been streaked, their conversation is exactly like that between Hermia and Demetrius, who are unaffected at this point.

The transformative power of the fairy magic is thus just like other forces operating in the mortal world. Equally, the performance element of Robin's tricks is just like the stage drama within which it is framed. What is remarkable about the intervention of the fairies is that it has to be permanent: the effect of the love-potion on Demetrius that brings him to love Helena is never removed. Only permanent magic keeps him from lapsing back into his vain pursuit of Hermia. It is interesting to note that this vital aspect of the play has not always been preserved in performance. Both Madame Vestris's production of 1840 and Charles Kean's of 1856 had Robin apply the neutralising antidote to the eyes of all the lovers, so destroying the crucial permanent alteration of perception which enables the comic resolution, and simultaneously removing the transformative function which characterises the effect of the night spent in the forest.

If we see the night spent in the forest as a transformative dramatic event, the mechanicals' play stands starkly in contrast as a non-transformative dramatic event. It shares, however, the anxieties about mistakings that are dramatised in the wider play. At first we might think that there is a problem in the mechanicals' appreciation of the dynamics of performance, for they seem ignorant of what Coleridge called the audience's willing suspension of disbelief.[3] Recently this view has been challenged, and an argument

presented to mitigate the comic element in the players' concerns about the reception of their performance. James Kavanagh saw the mechanicals' problems as being essentially the same as those confronting Shakespeare in his own practice as presenter of drama:

> These characters [the mechanicals] have . . . the problem of producing an *appropriate* – that is, a class-appropriate, and therefore politically acceptable – dramatic representation. . . . Shakespeare's artisans pose the issues quite clearly in their discussion: for us to assert an effective ability to manipulate *their* sense of reality, for *us* to disrupt *their* lived relation to the real, would be an unacceptable usurpation of ideological power, possibly punishable by death; we must temper our dramatic practice, restrain its effect, and inscribe in it the marks of our own submission.[4]

Kavanagh was concerned to emphasise the serious nature of the fears of the players, and argued that Shakespeare seriously had to concern himself with the same problems. Such a reading seems hard to support unless one overlooks the extent to which the mechanicals exist in the play merely to be laughed at, and Kavanagh did indeed ignore this. However, Kavanagh rightly pointed out that the mechanicals are, by their trades, as much proto-bourgeois as they are rustic clowns, and that they employ

> an inversion of the Brechtian alienation aesthetic, displaying the conditions of ideological production – of dramatic effect and 'defect' – not in order to enable a working-class audience intelligently to assert its political power, but to enable this workers' troupe to *escape* the political power of a ruling class.[5]

Kavanagh's argument was that the mechanicals are working under the contradictory conditions of nascent bourgeois ideological practice within a framework of the political repression of that class; they have some dramatic freedom but choose to forgo it in return for political safety. Just why they choose to write explanatory material into their play (material that reassures the audience) has been misrepresented. Stanley Wells commented that the mechanicals are

'unable to distinguish between the imaginary and the real, and they fear that others will share their inability'[6] but that is not right. The mechanicals fear that others will mistake their play for reality, and they wish to let the audience in on what they (the players) know, which is that theatre is illusion. Thus they fear that others do not share their perspicacity, which is the opposite of Wells's claim.

We can absolve the mechanicals without denying (as Kavanagh did) that they exist to be laughed at. In performance, the mechanicals' behaviour can seem considerably more dignified than that of their onstage audience, who interrupt incessantly and crack unfunny jokes to amuse themselves. Indeed, the Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play directed by Greg Doran in 2004 had the mechanicals begin to discover their own performative power during their play and to overcome the hostility of the audience, and the limitations of their script, in the genuinely affecting pathos of Thisbe's lament for Pyramus and in the spectacle that accompanied Quince's comic narration. The acting of the inset play was, if anything, more impressive than the acting of the outer play, and the tables were thus turned on the inner and outer audiences (those in the court of Athens and those in the theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon) who thought they knew what to expect of the night's entertainment.

The Athenian players come together to produce a play intended for the marriage celebration of Theseus and Hippolyta. They are aware that their production will merely fill the time between Theseus satisfying his appetite for food and satisfying his appetite for sex. We might wonder whether a professional dramatist such as Shakespeare would think this an appropriate use of drama. His play is concerned with the transformative power of drama, and deliberately makes the night in the forest analogous to a dramatic experience. This kind of dramatic experience is fraught with problems of perception, and nobody has a privileged position from which to judge events. Yet this dramatic experience changes things permanently and enables the comic resolution.

The mechanicals' play is predicated upon Theseus's crass desire to pass time, and the laughter at the expense of the mechanicals is inevitable given the constraints under which they are working. Theseus himself says that the tongue-tied ineptness of his

subjects only serves to enhance his sense of his own importance (5.1.89–105). Robin Goodfellow's final address to the audience serves to make the entire performance into a dream, akin to the dream which is the experience of the night in the forest. Thus the whole play is to be wrapped up and presented as a transformative drama, not as a time-filling drama. What is truly comic about the mechanicals' play is that Theseus gets exactly what he wanted, a 'palpable-gross play' (5.1.357), and he is well satisfied with it because it enabled him to laugh at the ineptitude of those over whom he rules. But Robin Goodfellow's final address disassociates the playwright from such a view of dramatic experience, and emphasises a much more profound role for drama: as profound indeed as dreams.

BENIGN AND MALIGN DECEPTIONS

Those who put on performances in *Much Ado about Nothing* think they know what the outcomes will be, and the transformations they seek to bring about in making Beatrice and Benedick love one another are really the bringing forth of what is already there but dormant. That is to say, the theatre audience knows that Beatrice and Benedick are in love with one another, and their aristocratic friends know it too, but they themselves are ignorant of it, thinking that they dislike one another. This is rather a subtle psychological device on Shakespeare's part, and it is a good example of what is called dramatic irony: the audience knowing more than the characters do about the world they are in. But it is more than merely irony, for as an audience we come to believe more strongly in the mutual love of Beatrice and Benedick the more that they express its opposite. How Shakespeare achieves this trick of making us feel that we understand characters better than they understand themselves is worth exploring for it goes to the heart of his much-discussed realistic characterisation, which is arguably his strongest claim to genius. His characters just seem so believable that one can know them as one knows one's friends.

Before looking at how Beatrice and Benedick are subject to benign performative deceptions, let us examine the play's central

malign performative deception, Don John's trick, the fuss about nothing that gives the play its title. Before the main event of convincing Don Pedro and Claudio that they have seen proof of Hero's premarital sexual infidelity, Don John warms up with a trick of convincing Claudio that Don Pedro wants Hero for himself. The occasion is a masked celebration in which the characters wear disguises and are not supposed to know with whom they are talking. Notice what a difficulty Shakespeare sets himself, for the characters have to be plausibly unsure of who is whom while the theatre audience remains able to tell them apart, lest the whole scene descend into incoherence.

The trick starts in the first scene with the agreement between Don Pedro and Claudio that at the masked celebration the former will woo Hero on the part of the latter:

> [DON PEDRO]
> I will assume thy part in some disguise,
> And tell fair Hero I am Claudio.
> And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
> And take her hearing prisoner with the force
> And strong encounter of my amorous tale.
> Then after to her father will I break,
> And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
> In practice let us put it presently. *Exeunt*
> (1.1.304–11)

From the outset, this is a play in which male partners are substituted one for another and we can respond to that in at least two contrasting ways. One might say that men are shown to be exchangeable in the way that the marriage vows perhaps hint – 'do you take *this* man?' requires that the referent be pointed out – and that one is as good as another. However, we might think that this playful substitution by the men makes Hero merely a pawn that men pass between themselves as a toy, and that she is merely a conduit for the relationships that the play is really concerned with, those (as the title of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's book on this topic has it) *Between Men* (1985).[7] An approach from either perspective would have to draw into its reading the fact that the comic resolution is made possible

by reversing the trick that Don Pedro and Claudio propose at the beginning: Claudio agrees to marry whoever is brought before him ('this woman') in the final scene.

Just which of those two responses we make as readers is not an idle matter of interpretation that we can keep separate from the play's meanings to its first audiences, for just what Don Pedro and Claudio have in mind is almost immediately a matter of interpretation within the action. Having loitered unseen in their presence, Borachio reports the scheme as though it were overt trafficking of Hero rather than a merry trick to play on her:

> [BORACHIO] I . . . heard it agreed upon
> that the Prince should woo Hero for himself and, having
> obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.
> (1.3.56–9)

This seems to suggest that what is being sought is Hero's agreement to marry and that who is to be bridegroom is a matter that can be fixed up afterwards by the men. This is not to say, of course, that Don John is scandalised by the proposed anti-feminist abuse – he simply sees an opportunity to hurt Claudio – but the play does invite us to wonder at what point Don Pedro's impersonation of Claudio is to be dropped. This ambiguity in the plan gives Don John the chance to work on Claudio's insecurity and with a few Iago-like words timed to coincide with ambiguous stage action (the Prince is said to have taken Hero's father aside) Don John can convince Claudio that 'the Prince woos for himself' (2.1.164).

This mistaking of Claudio's is quickly put right, and it serves two purposes in the play: it gives a foretaste of the larger mistaking that is the play's title, and it shows Claudio to be the kind of immature dupe who is easily taken in by malicious deception. Perhaps maturity is not the issue, however, for when, about five years later, Shakespeare rewrote this play in a tragic register, calling it *Othello*, he made the dupe a middle-aged soldier. Here, Don Pedro seems to have the kind of older-brother good sense that is able to keep Claudio from serious harm, but this impression is really a trap that Shakespeare is laying for us, since in the central disaster Don Pedro is just as misled as Claudio.

In its flirtation with disaster, a comedy like *Much Ado about Nothing* uses exactly the devices and emotions that cause tragedies to end unhappily, such as mistaken identity, sexual jealousy, rivalry within families, and most especially revenge. Since the 1980s especially it has been unfashionable to assert that these are universals of human behaviour and criticism has attended to exceptional cases that undermine the universalist claim. After all, as the cultural relativists point out, whither the sexual jealousy seen in plays such as *Othello* when they are read or performed in cultures that make no normative assumption of monogamy in human relations? This attention to the exceptions at the expense of the usual standards of monogamy in human relationships has caused an overstatement of the historical and cultural differences that separate the assumptions expressed by those in the plays from those that exist in the minds of modern readers and playgoers.

SOLDIERS TURNED LOVERS

But even leaving this wider problem of cultural difference aside we can observe that the motors of anxiety (ultimately relieved by joy) in the comedies and of disaster in the tragedies are ubiquitous across the Shakespeare canon regardless of play genre. For example, here is Shakespeare's Richard 3 cataloguing the inversions of custom and practice that follow when soldiers go off duty and start to think about love and sex:

> [RICHARD GLOUCESTER]
> Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
> Our bruisèd arms hung up for monuments,
> Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
> Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
> Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front,
> And now – instead of mounting barbèd steeds
> To fright the souls of fearful adversaries –
> He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
> To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
> (*Richard 3*, 1.1.5–13)

The same motif appears in *Much Ado about Nothing* when Benedick ponders the recent transformation in the soldier Claudio:

> [BENEDICK] I have
> known when there was no music with him but the
> drum and the fife, and now had he rather hear the
> tabor and the pipe. I have known when he would have
> walked ten mile afoot to see a good armour, and now
> will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a
> new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the
> purpose, like an honest man and a soldier, and now is
> he turned orthography. His words are a very fantastical
> banquet, just so many strange dishes.
> (*Much Ado about Nothing*, 2.3.13–21)

That we see such continuities across Shakespeare plays as different as this historical-tragedy and this romantic-comedy might easily tempt us to conclude that what unites them, the fact that they are Shakespeare's work, explains what they have in common.

In fact, this martial sentiment was a standard observation about off-duty soldiers and it can be found in works that predate the start of Shakespeare's career such as John Lyly's *Campaspe* (first performed 1580–4):

> HEPHESTION Is the warlike sound of drum and trump
> turned to the soft noise of lyre and lute, the neighing of
> barbed steeds, whose loudness filled the air with terror and
> whose breaths dimmed the sun with smoke, converted to
> delicate tunes and amorous glances?[8]

and

> [PARMENIO] . . . a kind of softness in every man's mind,
> bees to make their hives in soldiers' helmets, our steeds
> furnished with footcloths of gold instead of saddles of steel,
> more time to be required to scour the rust off our weapons
> than there was wont to be in subduing the countries of our
> enemies? . . . Yea, such a fear and faintness is grown in court

> that they wish rather to hear the blowing of a horn to hunt than the sound of a trumpet to fight. O Philip, wert thou alive to see this alteration – thy men turned to women, thy soldiers to lovers, gloves worn in velvet caps instead of plumes in graven helmets – thou wouldst either die among them for sorrow or confound them for anger.[9]

In all these accounts there is expressed a fear of effeminisation when soldiers turn to love, and this does point to a substantial difference in assumptions about sex that seems to separate these plays from our own time.

All three plays harp on the translation of martial sounds into sweet music: 'stern alarums' to 'merry meetings', 'dreadful marches' to 'delightful measures', 'drum and the fife' to 'tabor and the pipe', 'drum and trump' to 'lyre and lute', 'neighing of barbed steeds' to 'delicate tunes', and 'the sound of a trumpet to fight' to 'the blowing of a horn'. Regarding what may be worn, armour is neglected or else used only for display and men are worrying not about their safety but about the cut of soft clothes, and they are carrying tokens of allegiance to women ('gloves worn in velvet caps') rather than tokens of allegiance to other men ('plumes in graven helmets'). Everywhere the soft has replaced the hard and things fancy (in appearance, demeanour, behaviour, and language) have replaced things plain.

In his tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) Shakespeare made this the central idea of the play: a Roman warrior has been tempted into soft, foreign ways. Indeed, we could also say that this temptation structures the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for the one thing that an audience might have been expected to know about Theseus of Athens is that he was a great warrior, and yet the play (and also the inset tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe*) attends to the off-duty love-life of the soldier. Clearly then, it will not do to say that comedy and tragedy are fundamentally different in their concerns. Rather, what seems to matter is the outcome, and as George Gordon Byron put it in his poem *Don Juan* (1819–24) 'All tragedies are finish'd by a death, | All comedies are ended by a marriage'.[10]

Yet even in this distinction there remain problems, for the mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows how easily

a tragedy may be received by its audience as a comedy. This still happens in live theatre, and such an occasion is described from an actor's point of view in an hilarious account of the unintentionally comic production of *Macbeth* at the Old Vic theatre in London in 1980 that, among numerous misjudgements, overdid the bloodiness of the murders.[11] The mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to tap into the submerged and usually unacknowledged hilarity that is latent in the most appalling violence and cruelty. Even when the performance is being received as its practitioners would have it received, the distinction that Byron so pithily summarised is not really available to an audience unless they know the play. With a printed book one may skip to the end to check the outcome before investing time in reading the whole story, but there is no equivalent action one can take during a performance.

DETERMINING GENRE

An examination of the first printings of Shakespeare's plays suggests that readers were most keen to know the genre of the play, for not one of his books from the 1590s omits from its title page a statement of genre using formulae of the kind 'The most lamentable Romaine tragedie of Titus Andronicus' (1594) and 'A pleasant conceited comedie called, Loues labors lost' (1598). But in the first year of the new century the pattern changed when two new plays were published with title pages that gave no clue as to their genre but simply stated their titles: 'A midsommer nights dreame. As it hath beene sundry times publickely acted . . .' and 'Much adoe about nothing. As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted . . .'. The books were printed by different printers and published by different publishers, so we may wonder if something other than chance were at work in the unusual omission of the indication of genre. Did readers no longer want to know before they began to read whether the contents ended happily? This seems unlikely, for the publishing of plays seems to have been parasitic on the performance industry, in the sense that the books were targeted at readers wanting to recapture the pleasure of seeing the plays performed in the theatres.[12]

There is evidence that for a tragedy the theatre stage may normally have been hung with black cloth,[13] and although there was no colour for comedy perhaps the mere absence of black made it clear that events would conclude happily. On the other hand the few scant references to black hangings signalling tragedy might be read as indicating that the practice was never universal and hence was not relied upon as a definite signal. For us the genre is usually clear from foreknowledge of the play, for who does not know, for example, that *Romeo and Juliet* ends unhappily for the lovers? However readers and theatregoers often report that for all this foreknowledge (which of course we should try to forget if we want to think historically), *Romeo and Juliet* feels like a comedy in the first third of its action and only definitively turns tragic with the death of Mercutio.

This raises a complication that Byron's formula for genre obscures, because as well as the ending to consider there are certain rules about what may happen along the way. Traditionally in comedies no-one should come to serious harm and good characters such as Mercutio certainly should not die, so at this point the original audience – if they had no others clues to go on – became sure that the play was to be a tragedy. At least, this was the tradition until around 1600 when there emerged the new genre of tragicomedy, in which the good may suffer, even die, and yet the play ends happily. This mixed mode Martin Wiggins called an 'hermaphrodite' genre,[14] but for our purposes with these two plays from the 1590s we may leave this complication aside. We might wonder at what point a theatre audience would become sure that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing* are comedies, and whether the same is true for readers of the plays. Both kinds of consumer would presumably know the titles of the works – the reader from looking at the title page and the playgoer from reading the playbill – and we might think that these give away the plays' essentially non-serious matter.

We will consider the importance of titles in a moment, but for now let us pursue the question of whether a reader or a playgoer can tell from the action, as it unfolds, whether a play is a comedy or a tragedy. Having said that *Romeo and Juliet* begins as though a comedy and veers off into tragedy rather sharply with the death of Mercutio, we

should of course acknowledge that the play has a prologue that gives away the entire plot, including the deaths of the eponymous heroes. Before placing too much value on that fact, and inferring from its unusual spoiling of the story something intentional on Shakespeare's part, we should reflect on our general ignorance about how common were prologues and epilogues. Did every play have them? Were they always spoken or only for performances on special occasions?

There is evidence that prologues and epilogues were not necessarily written by the dramatist who wrote the rest of the play – it seems to be the responsibility of dramatists attached to particular acting companies to refurbish a play for revival in the repertory by giving it a new prologue and epilogue – and even that they could be transferred from one play to another.[15] Indeed, it is possible that prologues and epilogues had a different rate of survival than the rest of the plays they framed because they are essentially occasional and that from around 1600 they were used to accompany the first performance only, known as the 'trial'.[16] In this view, the prologue and epilogue were written to elicit the audience's opinion on the work (hopefully a positive one) and indeed in response to the 'trial' it seems that a play could be altered. Having this power was perhaps one of the reasons that audiences were willing to pay more to attend a play's first performance than they would pay at subsequent performances.

It seems then that we should not treat the prologues and epilogues in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as integral to the play, and hence the spoiling of the plot in the former is not necessarily an artistic disruption of a presumed expectation of suspense. Equally, that *Much Ado about Nothing* has no prologue or epilogue might only be because these detachable and recyclable writings were, in this case, not with the playtext when it was sent for printing in 1600. What then had audiences, and what have we, to go on in responding to a play?

DIRTY JOKES AND SEXUAL MORES

The title of *Much Ado about Nothing* is something that we can use to explore how audiences were positioned to respond, seriously or

lightly, to the play. At one level it is just a dirty joke, for 'nothing' (no-thing) was Elizabethan slang for the vagina.[17] Thus Hamlet is making a crude joke at Ophelia's expense (and all the more shocking as her father is present) in the following exchange:

> HAMLET (*to Ophelia*) Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
> OPHELIA No, my lord.
> HAMLET I mean my head upon your lap?
> OPHELIA Ay, my lord.
> HAMLET Do you think I meant country matters?
> OPHELIA I think nothing, my lord.
> HAMLET That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
> OPHELIA What is, my lord?
> HAMLET No thing.
> (*Hamlet*, 3.2.107–15)

An actor who wants to make the joke more explicit could stress the first syllable of 'country' (thus, 'cunt') for this was a common Elizabethan quibble and still survives in the mocking address of a police officer as *const*able. The nothing/no-thing pun draws not only on the common characterisation of the female genitals as an absence, a wound, a lack (with all the sexist connotations that go with this characterisation) but also draws on the round hole of the number zero (O, nothing) looking somewhat like the hole of the vagina.

Read as essentially the same joke about genitals the title of *Much Ado about Nothing* means that this is a story of a great fuss about Hero's vagina, and the contested question of whether a male 'something' has been in this 'nothing' prior to her marriage. In fact, although strictly speaking nothing should be in this nothing, Hero's father is prepared to accept that Claudio's something might lawfully have been there so long as he makes an honest woman of her by marriage, and he is aware that young couples are eager to enjoy the religiously-sanctioned sexual pleasure that marriage bestows (4.1.45–50).

Having got consent to marry Hero, Claudio expresses the same impatience to get to bed that we saw in Theseus at the start of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and has to be told to wait by her father:

DON PEDRO County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?
CLAUDIO Tomorrow, my lord. Time goes on crutches till love have all his rites.
LEONATO Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just sevennight, and a time too brief, too, to have all things answer my mind.
(2.1.332–8)

When Claudio rejects Hero because she is not a virgin but rather 'She knows the heat of a luxurious bed' (4.1.41), Leonato assumes that Claudio means that he himself has had sex with her:

LEONATO
Dear my lord, if you in your own proof
Have vanquished the resistance of her youth
And made defeat of her virginity –
(4.1.45–7)

Leonato and Claudio are familiar with the excuse that engaged couples might make for their premarital sex – that they simply pre-empted what was to come to them in time – and both seem to treat it as a light fault, which rather charmingly suggests a benign tolerance of human sexual incontinence within monogamy. Thus Claudio and Hero succumbing to the desire for premarital sex would sit neatly within the generic paradigm: comedy valorises licence (within limits) and treats lightly small sins that some people take too seriously. At least, this is so if lawfully-sanctioned marriage follows hard upon the sex.

In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare dramatises the predictable consequence of premarital sex, which is premarital pregnancy, the situation he found himself in as a young man to judge from the fact that he married Anne Hathaway in November 1582 and she gave birth to their first child in May of the following year. In *Measure for Measure* the marriage that would wipe away the shame of Claudio and Juliet's premarital sex is prevented by loss of the dowry, and worse still a change in the climate of sexual tolerance brings the full force of legal prohibition on Claudio, who is sentenced to execution for the crime.

So, it would not be quite right to say that the punning title of *Much Ado about Nothing* depends on the paradox that nothing should have been in Hero's 'nothing' prior to marriage. And yet nothing has been, so the title remains true: it is a fuss over nothing (nothing happened) and over a 'nothing' to which something is supposed to have happened. It is also about a nothing in as much as the audience is curiously denied the sight and sound of the alleged offence: there is an absence at the centre of the action. The moment when Claudio and Don Pedro witness a sign of Hero's infidelity is only anticipated and recalled in the play, not shown. First Don John promises 'Go but with me tonight, you shall see her chamber window entered' (3.2.102–3) and in the next scene Borachio brags how he brought Margaret into the deception: 'She leans me out at her mistress' chamber window, bids me a thousand times good night' (3.3.140–2). Between 3.2 and 3.3 the deception takes place without being shown to the audience.

It certainly would have been possible for Shakespeare's stage to represent Borachio entering or leaving the bedchamber, so we should consider why Shakespeare chose instead to use dialogue referring to these actions. The point seems to be that these actions (entering and leaving) are those that would precede and follow the event – the putative sex between Hero and Borachio – and which are taken for the event itself. Whether entering or leaving Hero's bedchamber, Claudio and Don Pedro are sure to infer from Borachio's presence that Hero is sexually active. The audience are distanced from the sexual act by a double frame: first the corollaries which precede and follow the implied act and second the *ekphrastic* narrative promise and recollection of those corollaries.

In his 1993 film of the play, Kenneth Branagh chose to show the audience the deception scene and he broke 3.2 after Don John says 'I know not that [Claudio means to marry] when he knows what I know' to cut to an interior shot of excited kissing between Borachio and Margaret, although from behind Imelda Staunton playing Margaret might easily be mistaken for Kate Beckinsale playing Hero. The next shot shows Don John, Claudio, and Don Pedro entering the garden and is followed by one showing Borachio and Margaret having sex on the balcony of Hero's bedchamber. Putting perhaps too fine a point on it – and surely risking alienation of his

unwitting assistant in this deception – Borachio moans 'Hero, Hero' in his sexual ecstasy. Returning to the dialogue of 3.2 more or less where we left it, Don John states what appears obvious: 'The lady is disloyal'.[18]

Branagh's realisation of the absent deception scene replaced Shakespeare's double framing device with the putative act itself since Don John brings Claudio and Don Pedro into the orchard at precisely the moment when no inference is needed to condemn Hero. As with Othello's misreading of the evidence against Desdemona, the inability of Don Pedro and Claudio to distinguish circumstantial evidence from matters bearing on the fact is an index of their gullibility. Branagh's interpolated scene diminishes this gullibility and increases Don John's skill at presenting a convincing deception. In the theatre the proposed deception sounds implausible and Shakespeare's doubled 'befores' and 'afters', which pointedly draw attention to the absent 'during', highlight the essential difference between circumstantial evidence and proof.

Branagh excuses Claudio and Don Pedro a little too readily. Perhaps to counterbalance this simplification of the play, Branagh introduced ambiguity by showing only the back of Borachio's sexual partner, allowing the audience to wonder, at least momentarily, whether Hero is guilty of the accusation. Shakespeare clearly did not intend to deceive the audience about Hero's fidelity in *Much Ado about Nothing*, but there are other moments in Shakespeare's work when we are justified in thinking that deception is intended. Usually the audience enjoy a privileged position from which the misunderstandings of the characters can be measured against a notional narrative truth, but in *The Comedy of Errors* the audience learn the identity of the Abbess only when it is revealed to the onstage characters at 5.1.346. At the other end of Shakespeare's career, Paulina's revelation that Hermione is alive at the end of *The Winter's Tale* is a similar surprise for the audience. Shakespeare rarely misled his audience. Branagh's balcony sex scene in *Much Ado about Nothing* raises the possibility that the cinema audience may experience a deception for themselves while watching others being taken in by it.

Once the accusation against Hero is public, the air of benign tolerance of sexual energies is dispelled and a surprising insistence on sinfulness takes its place. Where before Leonato seemed indulgent,

he now speaks of inherent and hereditary blemishes resulting from sex that is not religiously sanctioned:

> [LEONATO]
> Why ever wast thou [Hero] lovely in my eyes?
> Why had I not with charitable hand
> Took up a beggar's issue at my gates,
> Who smirched thus and mired with infamy,
> I might have said 'No part of it is mine,
> This shame derives itself from unknown loins.'
> But mine, and mine I loved, and mine I praised,
> And mine that I was proud on, mine so much
> That I myself was to myself not mine,
> Valuing of her –
> (4.1.131–40)

That is, Leonato wishes that rather than being a lawfully born daughter his Hero had been an abandoned baby born to a beggar woman and inheriting her shame, by which he must be thinking of a child born outside marriage. If only Hero were a bastard, Leonato could at least console himself that the terrible act this babe was to go on to do – the illicit sex he thinks she has enjoyed with Borachio – was the result of a corrupted nature inherited from her unknown parents.

Under the circumstances we might forgive Leonato his uncharitable outburst, which for most modern readers and audiences is rather too categorical in its verdict on the causes of adult behaviour and which overlooks the importance of childhood nurture in shaping the personality. On the other hand, science has not discovered the balance of the influences of nature and nurture and there is no reason to assume that the exact opposite of Leonato's position – that is, to assume that nurture determines all – is correct. The current scientific debate on this is summarised and polemically marshalled to attack certain liberal political assumptions in Steven Pinker's book *The Blank Slate* (2002),[19] and this issue is taken up again here in Chapter 7 when we consider the character of Caliban in *The Tempest*.

If we attribute Leonato's intemperate outburst to the emotion of the occasion and forgive him for it, a problem arises when Benedick

repeats its essential illiberality in a cold and serious pondering of just what has happened:

> FRIAR
> There is some strange misprision in the princes.
> BENEDICK
> Two of them have the very bent of honour,
> And if their wisdoms be misled in this
> The practice of it lives in John the bastard,
> Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies.
> (4.1.187–91)

Although readers of the play have encountered Don John named in stage directions and speech prefixes as the bastard brother of Don Pedro, no-one on the stage has uttered the word 'bastard' until now. That is, no playgoer would think of Don John as a bastard until Benedick names him one here, and we might even wonder whether some playgoers understood the label as an abusive epithet rather than a statement of fact.

However, the early published versions of the play are insistent on the fact of Don John's illegitimacy ('Bastard' is repeatedly used as his speech prefix) and we have to accept that for Benedick the illegitimacy explains the personality. It might be argued that Benedick is here responding not to Don John's illegitimacy but to his personal knowledge of the man, but it is nonetheless unavoidable that Benedick does not refer to his bastardy (indeed no-one does) until seeking to apportion blame and exonerate Don Pedro and Claudio. That Benedick is exactly right, the whole thing is indeed the 'practice' of Don John, and that Benedick is apparently a character that readers and playgoers are supposed to like, rather suggest that Shakespeare did not find this view of the supposed relationship between illegitimacy and personality abhorrent, as we do, and hence that we have here an illustration of how greatly social values have changed in the centuries between Shakespeare's time and our own.

The merry deceptions played on Beatrice and Benedick by their friends – the trick of allowing each to think they have overheard a report of the other's lovesickness – bring out their latent love for

one another. The latent hate of Don John for his brother is discovered by the watch overhearing the conversation of Conrad and Borachio, and to that extent the comic and serious strands of the plot are related by a mirroring of devices. But in an important way there is an imposed asymmetry too, for Don John is not discovered by a trick but by good (albeit slow-moving) police work and he is captured not by guile but by brute force.

In generating the audience's and the readers' anticipation that love underlies Beatrice and Benedick's incessant arguing and that hate underlies Don John's seeming love for his brother, Shakespeare repeated what he had done in making the events of *Romeo and Juliet* match those of the play of Pyramis and Thisbe in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* so that the former treats seriously what is farcical in the latter. Across the genres of comedy and tragedy Shakespeare repeatedly reworked analogous events so that simple definitions cast in terms of plot seem inadequate. In having so much in common regarding the love lives of off-duty soldiers in comedies and tragedies, Shakespeare appears to be suggesting that the genres are multiply enfolded one within the other. That is to say, there is comedy latent in tragedy and tragedy latent in comedy. As we shall see in the next chapter, the problems of genre distinction are just as acute in the third grouping that we have yet to consider, that of history.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not omniscient gods, for they misread human good behaviour as well as bad behaviour.
- The poet Byron gave a simple rule about genre based on whether marriage or death is the outcome.
- The substitution of one man or woman for another in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing* can make for comedy and tragedy equally, so we need other means to tell the genres apart.
- In Shakespeare's time the playhouse may have been hung with black cloth for tragedy.

- Until the rise of tragicomedy around 1600, no-one good died in a comedy, so if someone good like Mercutio died, the audience knew it was all going to go wrong.
- Sexual values and ideas about the relation of nature to nurture have changed fundamentally since Shakespeare's time.
- The core events of comedy and tragedy are the same and do not of themselves determine the outcomes.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Stanley Wells, New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 33.
2. Except where stated, all quotations of Shakespeare are from the electronic edition (prepared by Lou Burnard and published on disk in 1989) of the 1986 Oxford *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery.
3. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press), vol. 2, p. 6.
4. James Kavanagh, 'Shakespeare in Ideology', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 144–65, pp. 153–4.
5. Ibid., p. 155.
6. Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Stanley Wells, p. 27.
7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Gender and Culture, 19 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
8. John Lyly, Campaspe *and* Sappho and Phao, ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 2.2.40–5.
9. Lyly, Campaspe *and* Sappho and Phao, 4.3.6–27.
10. George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, 4 vols (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1957), II: Cantos 1–5, 3.9.65–6.

11. Kevin Quarmby, 'A Twenty-fifth Anniversary Study of Rehearsal and Performance Practice in the 1980 Royal Court *Hamlet* and the Old Vic *Macbeth*: An Actor's View', *Shakespeare*, 1 (2005), 174–87.
12. Gabriel Egan, ' "As it Was, Is, or Will Be Played": Title-pages and the Theatre Industry to 1610', in *From Performance to Print in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 92–110.
13. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 3:79.
14. Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of His Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 102–22.
15. Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 135–42.
16. Tiffany Stern, 'Re-patching the Play', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 151–77, pp. 161–3; Tiffany Stern, '"On Each Wall and Corner Poast": Playbills, Title-pages, and Advertising in Early Modern London', *English Literary Renaissance*, 36 (2006), 57–89.
17. Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols (London: Athlone, 1994), II: G–P, 'nothing'.
18. Kenneth Branagh, dir. *Much Ado About Nothing*, BBC/Renaissance/Goldwyn, 1993.
19. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

Histories: *Richard 2* and *Henry 5*

Shakespeare wrote two four-part history-play cycles, called tetralogies, listed here in the order the real historical monarchs reigned:

1) *Richard 2*,	*1 Henry 4*,	*2 Henry 4*,	*Henry 5*
2) *1 Henry 6*,	*2 Henry 6*,	*3 Henry 6*,	*Richard 3*

These two tetralogies were, in a sense, written out of sequence; those concerning the later reigns (2) were written before the ones concerning the earlier reigns (1). According to one overly neat critical paradigm that struggles against this fact of composition, the plays taken as a sequence of eight instantiate the Tudor Myth that Richard 2's murder brought England political turmoil and internecine struggle for six reigns until the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Henry Earl of Richmond (Henry 7) at the end of *Richard 3*. This mythological reading of the plays will here be considered alongside providential theory – the idea that God's judgment is being worked out in English history – and contrasted with the opposing view (illustrated from contemporary documents) that Machiavellian will-to-power is what human history really manifests.

Richard 2 is the obvious starting point for such interpretations of the larger series, but it will also here be given a reading that makes sense of it as a play that may be performed on its own, as it

apparently was. Taken alone, of course, the play more obviously shades off into tragedy, the subject of the next chapter. Regnally, *Henry 5* is the meeting place of the two tetralogies, but in order of composition it was the last one written and can be seen as a summation even as it ends with a reference forward to the disasters of Henry 6's reign, 'Which oft our stage hath shown'. The play has been particularly popular in times of war – landmark stage and screen productions coincided with World War 2, the Malvinas/Falklands war, and the Iraq War[1] – because of the subtle way the play combines matters of personal, political, and military probity. Henry can be presented as a martial hero or a war criminal, or some combination of the two, and the reading offered here will explore Henry's actions in relation to contemporary theories about morality on the battlefield.

THIS ENGLAND

In an episode of the BBC television comedy *The Vicar of Dibley* (2000) the local water company decides to flood the picturesque village of Dibley to make a reservoir that will solve the longstanding water shortage in the area. Initially opposed to its destruction, the landowners of Dibley change their minds when they learn of the generous compensation being offered, and it seems that the pursuit of money will overcome traditional obligations of rural custodianship. The largest landowner, Mr Horton, has an unexpected change of heart, however, and is seized by an access of patriotic fervour about 'This other Eden, demi-paradise, | This happy breed of men, this little world, | This precious stone set in the silver sea, | This blessèd plot, this earth, this realm, this *Dibley*'.

Mr Horton's encomium to Dibley wakens his fellow villagers' sense that a larger principle of community is at stake and mobilises a resistance to the water company's plans. His speech, of course, is drawn from Shakespeare's *Richard 2*, at the moment where the dying duke of Lancaster, whose name is John of Gaunt (because he was born in Ghent), rehearses the abuse he plans to hurl at the young king for his profligate ways and his neglect of his duty as the prime custodian of God's realm of England:

[JOHN OF GAUNT]
This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happier lands
This blessèd plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
(2.1.40–50)

We will attend in a moment to the problem of this speech ending awkwardly on a comma – there is in fact more, and more unpleasant, matter to come – and look first at the geography implied in this crescendo of patriotic fervour. Gaunt describes England as though it were an island, and makes a virtue of its being surrounded by the sea: nature made England as a kind of fortress with the sea as its moat, or (and Gaunt is unsure about his similes here) perhaps the sea serves as a kind of defensive wall.

This is a peculiar thing to say, for England has two other countries attached to it, Scotland and Wales, and only taken together can this three-country agglomeration, properly called not England but Great Britain, be said to form an island. (The label 'Great' Britain, far from being an arrogantly self-applied adjective, seems to derive from the French differentiation of the large *Bretagne* over the channel from the smaller one within France that is known in English as Brittany.) In Shakespeare's time a part of Ireland was colonised by people from England and Scotland who on arrival declared that Ireland was really British. Most of Ireland liberated itself from British rule in the early twentieth century, although Britain was able to retain control of a corner of the island by drawing a border around the area with the highest density of the colonisers' descendants (who retained an allegiance to Britain) and called this new statelet Northern Ireland. That this was truly a political rather than a geographical reality is clear when one considers that the most

northerly point on the island of Ireland, Malin Head, is in the area that the British perversely call 'the South'.

In modern times, as in Shakespeare's, pretending that a political necessity is a fact of geographical reality is a common ideological manoeuvre. Gaunt gives a radical simplification of the situation, for as far as he is concerned all this complexity – the complex relations of Scotland and England, the recurrent rebellions in Wales and in Ireland – can be subsumed under one simple heading: there is simply England, a singular thing surrounded by water that nature intended as a defence against invading foreigners. Why does he say that? The play is set in the late fourteenth century, but the proper context for this is England of the late sixteenth century when the play was performed. In 1595, English people were still coming to terms with recent changes in what constituted their country. Since the Norman Conquest, a single monarch in London ruled lands in France and England but throughout the late Middle Ages French towns and whole regions were in rebellion against the English crown. Bit by bit the English crown lost its French holdings, and the last possession to fall was Calais, which François de Lorraine, second duc de Guise, liberated from English rule in 1558.

Shakespeare's history plays dwell on England's loss of French holdings, and Calais is the location for the originating treasons in *Richard 2*: Mowbray is accused of misappropriating the Calais garrison's pay (1.1.87–132), and Mowbray and Aumerle are implicated in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester at Calais (1.1.100–3, 4.1.9–12, 4.1.71–3). With the contraction to a geographic unity (albeit one rather more internally heterogeneous than Gaunt's rhetoric acknowledges), and following the near catastrophe of the Spanish Armada in 1588, a proto-nationalism combining linguistic and ethnic realities emerged in this collective sense of Englishness. Gaunt's speech is making a virtue of the necessity that English power has withdrawn from France. At the time that Shakespeare was writing *Richard 2* a rebellion against English rule in Ireland was well underway and there was considerable fear that the colony could be lost. This makes certain of the play's events very topical, for Gaunt's wealth is stolen to pay for Richard's expedition to put down rebellion in Ireland, and the rebellion at home that this provokes

gathers head while bad weather prevents Richard's return home across the Irish sea.

Gaunt's speech about 'this England' seems like an encomium if we stop at those two words, but in fact there is only a comma there. What Gaunt goes on to say about the country seems at first to be more of the same kind of praise but actually descends into crude religious bigotry. Gaunt praises what we think of as the evil of the late medieval crusades against first Islam and, increasingly, against Judaism, for which the Pope of the Catholic Church apologised in 2000:

> [GAUNT]
> This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
> Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
> Renowned for their deeds as far from home
> For Christian service and true chivalry
> As is the sepulchre, in stubborn Jewry,
> Of the world's ransom, blessèd Mary's son;
> This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
> Dear for her reputation through the world,
> (2.1.50–7)

Understandably, this reference to English kings doing 'Christian service and true chivalry' as far as the Holy Land and encountering stubborn Jews (stubborn for not accepting Jesus's divinity) is rather embarrassing to modern ears and is frequently left out of recitations of Gaunt's speech. Mr Horton leaves it out, and so too does Sherlock Holmes when reciting the speech at the end of the patriotic anti-Nazi film *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1943).[2] As accompaniment to footage of British aeroplanes flying off to bomb Germany it would hardly be fitting to remind audiences of English anti-semitism.

To include the speech in its entirety, however, would be to read on still further, for the line 'Dear for her reputation through the world' also ends on a comma, and we have not yet reached the point of all this praise of Englishness. What Gaunt really wants to say, and will say if he is allowed to finish, is that all this wonderful Englishness has gone to hell recently:

[GAUNT]
This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty . . .
This other Eden . . .
This . . .
This . . .
This . . . this . . .
This . . .
This . . . this . . . this . . . this . . .
This . . . this . . .
This . . . this . . .
Is now leased out – I die pronouncing it –
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
(2.1.40–60)

After seventeen occurrences of 'this . . .', the final pronouncement (rhymed by use of 'is') reverses the seeming encomium. The greater the glory of what England used to be, the greater the shame of what it has now, under Richard's rule, become.

What has England become? Gaunt goes on:

[GAUNT]
England . . . is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
(2.1.61–4)

Richard is here accused of forming an economic arrangement with his subjects regarding the land, and this abnegates his responsibility towards it, for a tenement farm is one rented, not owned, by the farmer who works it. This changes the king's status from supreme ruler above the law to mere subject of it:

[GAUNT]
Landlord of England art thou now, not king.
Thy state of law is bondslave to the law
(2.1.113–14)

Gaunt characterises such contractual arrangements as rotten and a stain on England's character. Richard hastens to the dying Gaunt

to seize the valuables that would otherwise pass to his son Bolingbroke, so Gaunt's attack forms part of a larger pattern of Richard's disruption of ancient practices for the transference of wealth. Willoughby follows the same economic theme in citing as a reason for rebellion against Richard his use of 'blanks' (2.1.251), meaning documents promising the king unspecified amounts of money, and the play is insistently concerned with the paper form of these arrangements.

The historical Richard 2's right to rule England was based on his familial relation to his grandfather Edward 3, but he was succeeded by Henry Bolingbroke who took the throne by force to become Henry 4. Thus was broken a principle of succession by inheritance, and one of the attractions of Shakespeare's play *Richard 2* is its dramatisation of how this came about. Gaunt seems to accuse Richard of entering into some kind of contractual, economic relation with the land he is supposed to look after, just as the landowners in *The Vicar of Dibley* are seduced by the water company's generous compensation for agreeing to the destruction of their land. Whereas Mr Horton's speech brings them to their senses and persuades them to reject the pursuit of money, Gaunt's speech in *Richard 2* fails to stop the king's profligate and materialist ways, which are manifested in various kinds of contractual agreements that he has entered into, hence the king is a 'bondslave'.

Like the bond in *The Merchant of Venice*, the bonds in *Richard 2* seem to suggest a reification of obligations that corresponds to the replacement of a feudal set of values with their proto-capitalist substitutes, by which reading Richard's deposition is initiated by his own error of hastening the capitalist age in replacing immaterial ancient rights with material contracts. Put more simply, what he is up to smacks of capitalism and since monarchy is closely tied to the preceding economic system, feudalism, it is no surprise that Richard is overthrown. We might say that the king has hastened in the capitalist age and thus his use of capitalist contractual bonds has swept away the very principle that makes him king: the tradition of non-commercial bonds of loyalty and obligation. All the talk of bonds suggests that what Richard has done wrong, what Gaunt means by his accusation of leasing out the country, is to turn a feudal relationship between ruler and ruled that is God-given,

unwritten, and that inheres in the way the universe is structured, into a capitalistic relationship that is made between people, that is formalised in a contract, and that is subject only to human rules.

To read the play in this way is to treat it as a dramatisation of history that in some sense obeys the real laws of historical change, and to think this way one has to start from a belief that history has basic laws. The most famous systematisation of the laws of history (and the one implicit in the above comments) is the Marxist model in which the way that production is organised in any society is the most important fact in shaping its history, so that one can broadly characterise the march of epochs by their economic systems: slavery, feudalism, capitalism (now), and socialism (in the near future). Rather than pursue this Marxist reading, let us turn instead to what was until recently the most influential way of reading *Richard 2* and the wider cycle of Shakespearian history plays in which it is embedded, and which itself requires a grand model of historical change, and one very different from the Marxist model.

PROVIDENCE

In Shakespeare's time, official propaganda on the theory of politics held up absolutism as the only alternative to anarchy: God demands that subjects obey their monarch. But the question arises: what about bad monarchs and tyrants, does God demand that his subjects obey those? This is the question that arises at the start of *Richard 2*. In 1.2 the Duchess of Gloucester tries to persuade John of Gaunt to act against Richard who, they believe, murdered Gaunt's brother. The Duchess appeals to Gaunt's sense of self-preservation:

> [DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER]
> In suff'ring thus thy brother to be slaughtered
> Thou show'st the naked pathway to thy life
> (1.2.30–1)

But Gaunt responds that it is not for subjects to rise against their monarch, even if the monarch is a tyrant:

[JOHN OF GAUNT]
God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in his sight,
Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against his minister.
(1.2.37–41)

This is the official political line: even tyrants must be withstood patiently for rebellion against the monarch is a sin. Although official, this doctrine arises from a painful contradiction. In the 1530s Henry 8 broke from the Church of Rome, the Catholic Church, when it refused to grant him a divorce and he appointed himself head of a new Church of England which was theologically aligned with Protestant churches in Europe. The Protestant movement was dissident in the sense that Protestants had often felt obliged to defy the official Catholic religion of the country in which they lived. Thus there was a strong tradition of political dissent in Protestantism which theorised the correct behaviour when caught between duty to one's monarch and duty to God. One might have to disobey a monarch in order to be true to God, and in such a case one should patiently accept the punishment meted out.

What matters most in Protestantism, and this is its defining difference from Catholicism, is the individual's relationship with God: unmediated access to God – with minimal interference from priests and ceremonies – is the primary distinction of Protestant thinking. Individual free-thinking and self-reliance equipped the Protestant to deal with religious oppression but also might well encourage political free-thinking. After all, people used to defying authority in matters of religion might well start to think about the rest of the political machine and how it operates. With Henry 8's break from the Catholic church and the realignment of the church and state with Henry as head of both, this free-thinking tradition, however, became a dangerous piece of intellectual baggage. Now that Protestantism was the official religion of England, its tradition of dissent had to be controlled, and in particular the English monarchy had to assert that there was never any reason to disobey

the monarch. Propaganda was needed to argue that there could be no alternative to absolutism.

So, the official state doctrine, articulated in propaganda, was that God, not men, would provide the punishment for a bad monarch. But what if things were going badly for you – say your crops failed, or your home collapsed, or your family died of the plague? The same principle that God guides everything would lead you to conclude that you were being punished, and indeed many people did interpret bad things happening to them as divine punishment. Some religious thinkers interpreted the terrible outbreaks of the plague as God's punishment of sinners. Many critics have thought that Shakespeare believed in something like this principle, that whether it was God's doing or just the way of the world, wrong-doers finally get what they deserve. And not only was there supposed to be a kind of self-correcting principle at work at any particular time, but also there was an overarching historical principle leading to the present. Shakespeare was like many Elizabethans in believing that he lived in a special age and that the English history up to his day was the inevitable process of things getting better, or wrong-doing being pushed out of existence, of a gradually increasing glory climbing inexorably to the perfection of the reign of Elizabeth 1, known as 'Gloriana'.

Providence is the word for this notion that God takes care of things, for his ordering of human events for our benefit. It is often useful in the study of drama to work out whether the events of the play seem to happen because of Providence or because of human actions. To put it more simply, do wars get won or lost because of inevitable forces or because of human mistakes? At the start of *2 Henry 4* Shakespeare presents a symbolic representation of how mistakes are made, bringing on '*Rumour* [in a robe] *painted full of tongues*' to explain how misreporting of the outcome of a battle fatally guided the actions of the rebels. This pattern of misfortune following as a consequence of misreporting is discernible in many of Shakespeare's plays. In *Romeo and Juliet* the prologue says that the protagonists are 'a pair of star-crossed lovers', meaning that Fate is against them. But we do not see Fate causing the problem, rather we see the simple misreporting of Juliet's death (caused by an undelivered letter) drive the tragic outcome.

If God has a plan for everything, then mischance must be part of his plan and life only looks chaotic because we humans cannot see the big picture. But what if Fortune, with a capital F, is some kind of goddess independent of God, sharing power with him or even more powerful than him? In some plays there seems a kind of inevitability about people's downfalls: a man rises so he must fall, what goes up must come down, and this was sometimes imagined in the form of a Wheel of Fortune. However, there is a contradiction here, for Fortune is the opposite of God's order, it is the element of the unpredictability in everyday life, it is the bit beyond God's control. But a wheel is the very essence of predictability: we know that what rises must fall. One way of looking at the whole of Christian theology is as a kind of Wheel of Fortune running backwards: human beings fell down in the Garden of Eden (the Fall) and therefore will inevitably rise at the end of time.

This is an optimistic view in which things are bound to get better over time. Even without a Christian theology to support it, such an optimism has flourished since the eighteenth century because the world has, for many people, got better. We see people living longer now than ever before, we know more than our ancestors did, and we live more comfortably. You might think that no-one really believes the opposite pessimistic view in which everything is just getting worse, but there are at least two good reasons to suppose that the world is in decline. The first is that science tells us that in the long term the laws of thermodynamics mean that everything is heading towards a state of lowest energy, the universe is slowly running itself down to a standstill. The second reason is that belief in a golden age in the past seems to be buried in our collective unconscious. How often in stories are human beings of the past taller, stronger, more able than human beings now? We have myths about our ancestors being races of giants who have since died out. It is worth noting that in politics the optimistic model is advocated by socialists (who see a better future as possible if we just strive for it), just as it was the model advocated by the politically radical class of emerging bourgeoisie in Shakespeare's time.

SERIALISED HISTORY AND THE TUDOR MYTH

Shakespeare's *Richard 2* is but one of a collection of history plays that he wrote. Some were based on classical history – that is, the history of ancient Greece and Rome – and some were on early British history, before the Romans arrived around the time of Christ's birth. But when we talk about Shakespeare's history plays, what we generally mean are his plays that chronicle the kings of England from *Richard 2* (the last direct descendant in the line of William the Conqueror) down through time to Henry 7, Queen Elizabeth 1's grandfather. Here are those reigns in chronological order:

Richard 2 (reigned 1377–99)
Henry 4 (1399–1413)
Henry 5 (1413–22)
Henry 6 (1422–61)
Edward 4 (1461–83)
Edward 5 (1483)
Richard 3 (1483–5)
Henry 7 (1485–1509)

When the first complete works of Shakespeare was put together in 1623, seven years after his death, his history plays were put in the order of the historical figures, so essentially they were in the above order. In this order, the plays seem to show a simple pattern: the sin of the usurpation of Richard 2 plunges England into eighty-five years of internecine struggle between the two aristocratic families centred on the dukes of York and Lancaster.

The most influential twentieth-century view of Shakespeare's history plays has been the one given in E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944). This book drew heavily on the ideas outlined in its predecessor, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943), in which Tillyard described what he reckoned a typical educated Elizabethan person thought about how the world was ordered, the principles of temporal and divine governance, and the relationship between human affairs and the divine scheme. Tillyard saw a general faith in order and stability, manifested in an imagined

Great Chain of Being that allocated everything its place in a coherent structure, a hierarchy, that ultimately led to God. From lowest to highest, each element of the universe is linked to the others by this chain and is pulled from above and below. Thus the best aspects of a 'noble' beast are almost as good as, and are being pulled towards, the worst aspects of humanity, while the worst part of it is like a lower animal. The worst part of a lower animal is little better than plant life, and the worst part of plant life, moss growing on a rock, is little better than the rock on which it grows; human beings are thus torn between beastliness and the angelic. Social mobility, then, would be as absurd as a carrot wanting to be a rose, or a frog wanting to be a lion. In particular, the monarch was supposed to be God's deputy on earth, the binding link between heavenly and earthly order, and duty to one's monarch was a religious obligation.

In *Shakespeare's History Plays* Tillyard argued that a model of divine Providence governed Elizabethans' feelings about the deposition of Richard 2 (a great sin) and so the ensuing civil war (in the Henry 4, Henry 5, and Henry 6 plays) would have been understood as divine retribution necessary before the return of order in Henry 7's reign. Thus the Wars of the Roses could be seen from the vantage point of Shakespeare's time as the unfolding of divine retribution.

It is easy to see the appeal of this reading. It takes seriously the obviously serial nature of Shakespeare's history plays, with their multiple parts and their internal references back to events in their predecessors. Tillyard also ties the historical matter presented to the historical reality of the time (the 1590s) in which it was presented, for his position is that the plays are essentially telling a story that the Tudor monarchy would want people to believe, in which their dynasty, the Tudors, brought to an end a long period of strife initiated by the deposing of Richard 2 and thus made possible the peaceful Elizabethan present. This is the so-called Tudor Myth. Tillyard's contemporary Lily B. Campbell had the same conviction that the history plays were really about their own time, not the distant past, as is clear from the subtitle of her book *Shakespeare's 'Histories': Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (1947).

But is Tillyard right? Since the 1980s critics have tended to think not, and to wonder whether Tillyard saw the plays as a story of

originating sin that produces a long period of suffering that is finally removed by a saviour because that is how Tillyard himself liked to think about the world. Tillyard's conviction that the Elizabethans thought of orderliness as the natural state of the universe and of human social relations is made clear on almost every page of *The Elizabethan World Picture*, and critics have tended (without much cause) to assume that Tillyard's own politics were equally conservative. Leaving this biographical point aside we can say that Tillyard insisted that the World Picture was an ideology put to work 'by the Tudor regime' and that Shakespeare's genius lay in dressing with beautiful language 'the common property of every thirdrate mind of the age'.[3]

In his own time Tillyard was accused of homogenising Elizabethan views of historical change, as when Geoffrey Tillotson complained that Tillyard 'has become interested in certain notions of theirs, and he tends to think of them as repositories of those notions'.[4] In particular, Tillyard failed to spot that, like Shakespeare's plays, the chronicle sources offer multiple explanations and points of view rather than a single providential account of history.[5] However, Tillyard himself was aware of an alternative body of writing that sought to account for history, and that was the work of Niccolò Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's political writings, especially *The Prince* published posthumously in Italian in 1532, offered advice to rulers about how to get and keep power, and to their first readers these writings seemed startlingly cynical in tone and in their overt scorning of the pretensions to moral rectitude maintained by earlier advisers. A modern word that embodies the kind of political realism (as opposed to principled idealism) and cynicism for which Machiavelli became renowned is the German term *Realpolitik*. We know that educated Elizabethans read and discussed Machiavelli, but did they take his ideas seriously and even think that he was right that any amount of political scheming and subterfuge was justified so long as the strong ruler who uses them can keep the peace while holding on to power?

It is difficult to answer this question, but it should immediately be apparent that this kind of thinking gives us another way to understand the incessant fighting that runs through Shakespeare's

history plays. Perhaps in them we see the chaos that ensues when no strong ruler has yet emerged, and see the madness and savagery that follows not from divine displeasure but from all-too-human lust for power. In this view, the natural state of human society is not Tillyardian orderliness but its opposite, and order can only be achieved when it is imposed on the weak by the strong, so that striving for power is not a consequence of the disruption of order but a necessary prelude to it. In all matters of political strife, a reading based on Machiavelli's ideas would stress human action, opportunism, and plain good luck over Providence and God's personal interest in the dynastic clashes of the English monarchy.

In the case of *Richard 2* a realist, Machiavellian reading would explain Richard's fall and Bolingbroke's success not in terms of the necessary march of history, as a Marxist would (because the go-getting capitalist is bound to triumph over the feudal lord who expects everything to fall to him by right), nor yet in terms of a kind of Christian Fall of Man, as Tillyard would, in which this originary sin is to be regretted and yet is also a necessary prerequisite for eventual redemption. Rather, a realist, Machiavellian reading would stress the fact that Bolingbroke achieves the crown because he has the power to take it and that Richard's anticipated armies of angels (3.2.54–8) never materialise.

Earthly power, the play seems to say, is not a matter in which God intervenes, and whoever can muster the most armed men wins all. If this is what the play shows, there would seem to be some political danger in it, for surely rulers would not want representations that show monarchy to be just a matter of might over right. This was a problem that Machiavelli gave some attention to, showing how the ruler may manipulate public perception of himself to maintain the people in awe of him. Having taken the throne by force, Bolingbroke has demystified the nature of kingship, and this is something of a problem since as king he needs to reinstate the institution's semi-divine mystical status lest others wonder whether they too might raise an army large enough to take control.

Much of what happens in the plays that follow *Richard 2* – that is, in *1 Henry 4* and *2 Henry 4* – is concerned with this problem. As King Henry 4, the bulk of Bolingbroke's reign is occupied with putting down rebellions and securing his position in order that he

may pass the crown to his son, who will be Henry 5. Whether this succession would be legitimate is a tricky legal question that the plays tentatively explore. Does Bolingbroke's disruption of the line of succession (Richard 2 being a direct descendant of William the Conqueror) make his son's claim to the throne invalid? If so, are not all succession claims invalid since if one goes far enough back there are always usurpations to be found among the present monarchy's ancestors? Indeed, William the Conqueror's name itself indicates that he got the English throne by force, at Hastings, which might invalidate Richard 2's claim if one took too absolute a line about inheritance. Alternatively, one might argue that conquest is a legitimate way to acquire a monarchy and that it has crucial differences from usurpation. Those who advance this last argument tend not to define just what these differences are, and we may reasonably infer that the distinctions are at best disputable.

At some point, a bad claim becomes good, and a great deal of time is spent by characters in Shakespeare's *Henry 6* plays discussing the merits of the claim made by Richard 2's descendant, Richard Duke of York, that his title is better than that of Bolingbroke's grandson, Henry 6, precisely because Bolingbroke stole the crown. Although he must speak confidently, Henry 6's aside indicates what he really thinks about his own case:

KING HENRY
Henry the Fourth by conquest got the crown.
YORK
'Twas by rebellion against his king.
KING HENRY
[aside] I know not what to say – my title's weak.
(*To York*)
Tell me, may not a king adopt an heir?
YORK What then?
KING HENRY
An if he may, then am I lawful king –
For Richard, in the view of many lords,
Resigned the crown to Henry the Fourth,
Whose heir my father was, and I am his.
(*3 Henry 6*, 1.1.133–41)

Emphasising that two lineal successions have occurred since the 'conquest' of Richard, which he appears to admit at least to himself might not have been entirely lawful, Henry 6 seems to appeal to the nobles' sense that enough time has passed, and enough normal successions have taken place, that the sin of the 'conquest' be forgotten.

Such an argument is available to a grandson, but Henry 5's life is lived much closer to the events described above and for him his father's theft of the crown has, in many people's eyes, robbed the monarchy of the sacred state in which it was formerly held. Paradoxically, then, the very act that makes it possible for him to be king – his father's overthrow of Richard 2 – makes it difficult to maintain that position. We first hear of this future king in *Richard 2* when the newly-crowned Henry laments the character of his 'unthrifty son' (5.3.1). This description prepares the way for what follows in *1 Henry 4* and *2 Henry 4*, which show the transformation of this wayward youth, Prince Hal, into the much more suitably monarchial figure who, at the end of the second play, becomes Henry 5. The story of this transformation had been dramatised by others before Shakespeare attempted it, most notably in the play *The Famous Victories of Henry 5* (first performed 1583–8) whose author is unknown. This should remind us of the important principle, mentioned in the introduction, that what got written for the theatres was shaped by fashion: Shakespeare wrote history plays in the 1590s because it was a popular genre (he was following, not leading, a trend), and he stopped around the turn of the century because they seem to have gone out of fashion.

The wayward Prince Hal is clearly not ready to rule, and his father gives him the kind of advice that Machiavelli offered about how a monarch should keep his people in awe of him. Remembering that Bolingbroke had broken the principle of monarchial succession that he then needed to re-establish, his advice to Prince Hal about keeping out of the common gaze (so, not frequenting taverns) should strike us as what we would call good public relations:

[KING HENRY]
By being seldom seen, I could not stir
But, like a comet, I was wondered at,

That men would tell their children 'This is he.'
Others would say 'Where, which is Bolingbroke?'
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dressed myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crownèd King.
Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,
My presence like a robe pontifical –
Ne'er seen but wondered at – and so my state,
Seldom but sumptuous, showed like a feast,
And won by rareness such solemnity.
(3.2.46–59)

Prince Hal does eventually break with his tavern companions and manages to generate the kind of awe that Bolingbroke describes, but it is a difficult matter to determine whether he actually changes to become the legendarily good and successful king Henry 5 or whether Shakespeare is showing us the means by which he generates this as his reputation: that is, whether Shakespeare is reporting the myth or is himself one of the fabricators of it.

In the passage of *The Prince* that gave more offence than all the others, Machiavelli was quite explicit that generating a reputation for goodness, and not actually being good, is the secret to successful rule:

> Therefore, it is not necessary for a prince to have all of the above-mentioned good qualities, but it is very necessary for him to appear to have them. Furthermore, I shall be so bold as to assert this: that having them and practising them at all times is harmful; and appearing to have them is useful; for instance, to seem merciful, faithful, humane, trustworthy, religious, and to be so; but his mind should be disposed in such a way that should it become necessary not to be so, he will be able and know how to change to the opposite.[6]

It is possible to read the story of Prince Hal and his transformation in *Henry 5* as the putting into practice of Machiavelli's precepts.

Tillyard, however, was adamant that Machiavelli was irrelevant to understanding the history plays:

> Such a way of thinking was abhorrent to the Elizabethans (as indeed it always has been and is now to the majority), who preferred to think of order as the norm to which disorder, though lamentably common, was yet the exception. . . [I]n trying to picture how the ordinary educated contemporary of Shakespeare looked on history in the gross we do not need to give much heed to Machiavelli. His day had not yet come.[7]

Not until the political upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century, Tillyard believed, would thinkers take Machiavelli seriously enough to refute him in works such as Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651).

Others disagreed, and J. P. Brockbank read the plays against their sources, the prose histories (called chronicles) of England written by Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall, and found that these had absorbed the political principles of Machiavelli:

> They [the chronicles] wrote in a tradition which had quietly assimilated the mundane, realist attitudes for which Machiavelli was to become the most persuasive apologist . . . In *Henry 6* the sacrificial idea, which makes catastrophe a consequence of sin, is sharply challenged by the 'machiavellian' idea that makes it a consequence of weakness.[8]

The question to keep in mind, then, when reading or watching these plays is the extent to which you think (like Tillyard) that you are seeing God's grand plan for England being unfolded slowly over historical time, compared to the extent to which you see particular ruthless people rise and fall because of their own deeds and abilities. When reading, the degree to which you see a causal force will be largely conditioned by the presumptions that you bring to the text: such things as whether you believe in God and whether you think history has a purpose. On the other hand, when seeing the play performed you should remember that those who are making the meanings on the stage (especially the director, who has ultimate authority

in most modern performances) will have their own assumptions about religion and history and that what they choose to show will doubtless have been shaped by these assumptions, consciously and unconsciously.

THE ORDER OF COMPOSITION

You might be thinking that this is all starting to sound uncomfortably subjective, as though the history plays only mean whatever we want them to mean and that there are no historical facts. There are certain facts and they can help us at least in the matter of whether the whole eight-play, two-tetralogy cycle really is the telling of one grand and epic story of English history, as Tillyard maintained. As you can see from the list on page 57, Tillyard's readings make sense when we think of the kings in the order in which they reigned, with the sin of Richard 2's usurpation at the beginning, the civil strife that ensued (in the reigns of Henrys 4, 5, and 6, Edwards 4 and 5, and Richard 3), and redemption occurring with the succession of Henry 7, grandfather of the monarch reigning as the plays were written, Elizabeth.

But what if we think about the plays in the order Shakespeare wrote them, and link that to the order of the reigns? The outcome is this table:

Historical reality	**History play**
Richard 2 (reigned 1377–99)	2 Henry 6 (performed 1591)
Henry 4 (1399–1413)	3 Henry 6 (1591)
Henry 5 (1413–22)	1 Henry 6 (1592)
Henry 6 (1422–61)	Richard 3 (1592–3)
Edward 4 (1461–83)	Richard 2 (1595)
Edward 5 (1483)	1 Henry 4 (1596–7)
Richard 3 (1483–5)	2 Henry 4 (1597–8)
Henry 7 (1485–1509)	Henry 5 (1598–9)

The first thing Shakespeare did right at the beginning of his career was write three plays about Henry 6: Part 2, then Part 3, and then Part 1. This seems odd – why write Part 2 first? – until you think of how epic serials get written. The *Star Wars* films (1977 –), for

example, began with a story from the middle and then went back for what Hollywood calls a prequel, and the same thing happened here with what are called the Wars of the Roses, the struggle between the families of the Duke of Lancaster and the Duke of York for possession of the throne of England. After success with two plays about Henry 6, Shakespeare went back and wrote a prequel. Then he wrote a play about the reigns of Edward 4, Edward 5 and Richard 3, and this collection of four plays – the three parts of *Henry 6* and *Richard 3* – forms the first tetralogy. Then he really got the prequel bug and went back to the beginning of the story – starting with the last direct descendant of William the Conqueror, Richard 2 – and wrote four plays (the second tetralogy) about the events leading up to the Wars of the Roses, which is initiated because Bolingbroke of Lancaster deposed Richard 2.

It should be clear that the order of composition plays havoc with Tillyard's Tudor Myth reading in which the full suite of eight plays shows the disaster of Richard 2's fall, the long period of English civil misery (as though God were punishing the country for Richard's downfall), and then the redemption with the marriage at the end of *Richard 3*, which depicts the houses of York and Lancaster united in the person of Henry 7. The Tudor Myth is a neat scheme, and indeed it seems anticipated by what people say in the plays. Remember that Richard 2 talks about God's vengeance for his usurpation and although we don't see the armies of angels that Richard expects will fight on his side, perhaps the whole collection of plays taken together does show God's reaction. The Bishop of Carlisle even has a speech (4.1.125–38) that seems to prophesy the Wars of the Roses, making it seem that Shakespeare had the whole eight-play cycle in mind as he worked. Carlisle's speech anticipates what comes to pass in the later plays. Only, as we have seen, they are not the later plays, they were written earlier. The order of composition would seem to disrupt the neat, religious explanation of what is happening with English history in Shakespeare's work.

As soon as it was published, reviewers noted that Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* took good account of the ideas about history that were circulating in Shakespeare's time and that stories about how the relatively stable and orderly England of Elizabeth's reign had come into being did indeed use religion to

bolster patriotism. But they rightly complained that Tillyard had not taken good account of the history of Shakespeare's writing, and that when the plays are looked at in the order he wrote them it is hard to see the overall plan at work. Moreover, in *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (1970), Henry Ansgar Kelly pointed out that the sources Shakespeare used – the chronicles of Holinshed and Hall – are themselves ambivalent about the Tudor Myth and divine Providence. Certainly at times the chronicles seem to portray the hand of God shaping English history, but they also detail how human opportunism, politicking, and downright thuggery – the kind of thing that Machiavelli's name is associated with – played its part in making the history of England.

Perhaps the order of composition of Shakespeare's history plays can, nonetheless, be reconciled with the Tudor Myth reading of them. Suppose that when Shakespeare came to write the second tetralogy his playing company, the Chamberlain's men, revived the plays of the first tetralogy in their theatre, so that a playgoer could see the plays in their regnal order (rather than their order of composition) if she wanted to. At the end of Shakespeare's *Henry 5* there is a hint that this happened. The chorus enters to round off the play, and says that this happy king, Henry 5, was succeeded by his unhappy son:

> [CHORUS]
> Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned king
> Of France and England, did this king succeed,
> Whose state so many had the managing
> That they lost France and made his England bleed,
> Which oft our stage hath shown – and, for their sake,
> In your fair minds let this acceptance take. *Exit*
> (*Henry 5*, Epilogue 9–14)

The first tetralogy was written and first performed about eight or nine years earlier, which is quite a long time for the theatregoer to be expected to remember that the Chamberlain's men had indeed shown the story of Henry 6. It seems more likely that Shakespeare's company revived the Henry 6 plays at the end of the 1590s and put them on with the Henry 4 and Henry 5 plays to give those

playgoers who wanted it a grand sweep of English history leading to the Elizabethan present.

WHAT KIND OF KING IS HENRY 5?

The chorus at the end of *Henry 5* contrasts the happy and successful king shown in that play with his son Henry 6. But is the Henry 5 we see in the play really to be admired? Countless critics have thought so, and the play has been performed at key moments of English history, as with Laurence Olivier's film of 1944 that clearly sought to parallel the coming Allied attack upon Fortress Europe with Henry's European adventure.[9] The Royal Shakespeare Company production starring Kenneth Branagh (1984) and Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company production (1986), on the other hand, invoked the context of the 1982 war between Britain and Argentina over the islands called the Falklands or the Malvinas (depending on whose you think they really are) and these productions were considerably less inclined to see Henry as unproblematically heroic than Olivier was.

A useful starting point for considering why readers and theatre practitioners might be sceptical of Henry's actions is a previously little-noted event in the play that, once attended to, is so shocking that it gave the title to a book called *Henry V, War Criminal?* (2000). Arguably this book itself was especially attentive to acts that might constitute war crimes because in the decade preceding its publication, the 1990s, Europe had witnessed in the multiple Balkan conflicts its first military struggles since the end of World War 2. The book's authors John Sutherland and Cedric Watts drew attention to this moment in the battle of Agincourt:

> *Alarum*
> But hark, what new alarum is this same?
> The French have reinforced their scattered men.
> Then every soldier kill his prisoners. [*The soldiers kill their prisoners*]
> Give the word through.
> [PISTOL] *Coup' la gorge. Exeunt*

Enter Captains Fluellen and Gower
FLUELLEN Kill the poys and the luggage! 'Tis expressly against the law of arms. 'Tis as arrant a piece of knavery, mark you now, as can be offert. In your conscience now, is it not?
'Tis certain there's not a boy left alive.
(4.6.34–9 and 4.7.1–5)

Killing prisoners is, of course, contrary to modern rules of war and it was contrary to the rules that applied in Henry's time and in Shakespeare's. But could it be justified in the context of what happens in the play?

Sutherland and Watts point out that the second part of the above extract, which is a separate scene elsewhere on the battlefield, seems like a justification of the prisoner-killing: the French have overrun the rear of the English positions, where the stores of the army are kept and where the servants (boys) wait during the fighting, and are murdered indiscriminately. If this were to happen before Henry's order to kill prisoners, it might be thought to provide motivation for that act, since killing non-combatant children is itself a violation of the rules of war, as Fluellen rightly says.

We might suppose that although Fluellen's reaction to the killing of the children is shown to the theatre audience after Henry's order to kill the French prisoners, the boys were in fact killed first, in which case the French were the first to break the rules. However, as Sutherland and Watts point out, we did not see Henry receiving news of the killing of the boys and reacting to it, rather his order to kill French prisoners is a reaction to the realisation that 'The French have reinforced their scattered men', which is an ordinary setback in the battle.

Well after Fluellen's reaction to the killing of the children, we get what seems to be Henry's reaction to it:

KING HARRY
I was not angry since I came to France
Until this instant. Take a trumpet, herald;
Ride thou unto the horsemen on yon hill.
If they will fight with us, bid them come down,

Or void the field: they do offend our sight.
If they'll do neither, we will come to them,
And make them skirr away as swift as stones
Enforced from the old Assyrian slings.
Besides, we'll cut the throats of those we have,
And not a man of them that we shall take
Shall taste our mercy. Go and tell them so.
(4.7.53–63)

This is most odd: the king enters with his army – well, a small representative band of them we should suppose, as even open-air theatres have limited space on the stage – and accompanied by French prisoners. Why are these prisoners not dead, as Henry ordered and as indeed he orders again here? Coming after Fluellen's moving reaction to the murder of the children minding the luggage, we have to suppose that Henry's anger here is his response to the same event. But it must be observed that the play seems curiously evasive about just what happens in this battle.

If we want to construct a reading of the play in which Henry exhibits the characteristics of a twentieth-century war criminal, the play is not short of material. Talking to the governor of the town of Harfleur to persuade him to yield to the English army, Henry threatens to let his soldiers do what soldiers do when military discipline is set aside:

[KING HARRY] Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command,
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil, and villainy.
If not – why, in a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes.
(3.3.110–21)

The modern word for such threats, whether or not they are carried out, is terrorism, for the purpose is to achieve a military and/or political end by instilling fear into a non-combatant, civilian population.

However, to state the matter as baldly as that may be to mistake the nature of drama about war, which is as much concerned with language as it is with action. Noting that, as Andrew Gurr pointed out, the scaling ladders brought on to scale the walls of Harfleur in 3.1 are never needed, Janette Dillon observed that

> This aspect of the scene may point to the . . . prominent role of rhetoric in achieving victory in this play . . . [It] focuses the audience's imaginative attention on the wall through language rather than stage action, in a way that requires them to empathize with the effort of will necessary for such action rather than lose themselves in the excitement of action itself . . . .[10]

In 3.3 the same principle is continued: Henry talks his way into Harfleur rather than fighting his way in. Perhaps that is a better outcome overall. Whether or not we condemn Henry for his threats, we should observe two points here. The first is that, having seen in Chapter 1 how Shakespeare portrays the off-duty lives of soldiers and their being condemned for falling from heroic action to mere love, we can now see that his representation of that heroic action itself may contain elements of extraordinary brutality. The second is that this is not the first time Shakespeare presented his audience with a chance to favour persuasion-by-language (which is what the term 'rhetoric' essentially means) over conquering by force: one can read *The Taming of the Shrew* as the story of a relatively enlightened husband who uses language and mind-games (in modern terms perhaps even brainwashing) to make his wife conform to his will, instead of simply beating her as some written authorities of Shakespeare's time advocated.

Thinking about Henry's military actions in terms of rhetoric can change the way we think about his wooing of Princess Catherine of France. Henry begins his wooing with the standard disclaimer of rhetoricians that they are not terribly good with words ('Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking . . .'):

KING HARRY Fair Catherine, and most fair,
Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms
Such as will enter at a lady's ear
And plead his love-suit to her gentle heart?
(5.2.98–101)

This is standard stuff and not to be believed, and hence not to be played as truthful by actors. Read with a sceptical eye, or performed with a sense of what Henry's rhetoric has already achieved in this play, the wooing of Princess Catherine can seem as full of subtlety and guile as Richard 3's wooing of Lady Anne (*Richard 3*, 1.2). Like Richard, Henry has to twist logic to overcome the fact that the object of his desire comes from the party that his side has just defeated in bloody conflict:

CATHERINE Is it possible dat I sould love de *ennemi* of France?
KING HARRY No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate. But in loving me, you should love the friend of France, for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it, I will have it all mine; and Kate, when France is mine, and I am yours, then yours is France, and you are mine.
(*Henry 5*, 5.2.169–76)

Similarly, in response to Lady Anne's 'It is a quarrel just and reasonable, | To be revenged on him that killed my husband' – Richard indeed killed her husband and his father too, whose bleeding body is horribly present in this scene of wooing – Richard offers the brilliant reversal, just like Henry, that 'He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband, | Did it to help thee to a better husband' (*Richard 3*, 1.2.136–9).

Where did Henry get his rhetorical power? In one of the most influential essays on the character of Prince Hal/King Harry, indeed one of the most influential Shakespearian essays ever, Stephen Greenblatt brilliantly reinterpreted the transformation of the wastrel adolescent into the heroic man to argue that the former state was necessary to the latter.[11] That is, Hal had to spend time

slumming with the low-life of Eastcheap in order to learn the true ways of the world and so equip himself to better command his people once he became king. Greenblatt began by considering contemporary accounts circulating in England about the native Americans that explorers were coming into contact with in the New World. Walter Raleigh sent the mathematician Thomas Harriot to record and describe the Virginian colony, and Harriot learnt the North Carolina Algonkian dialect and studied the Indians, whose religion was, according to Harriot, a manipulation of beliefs by the priests in order to achieve social cohesion.

The Indians began doubting their own religion when confronted with the (seemingly magical) objects brought by the Europeans, and this appeared to confirm Machiavelli's assertion that religion is just a device for princes to keep their populations in awe and so promote civil obedience. From this perspective, the New World offered a unique anthropological opportunity to test Machiavelli's hypothesis (in his *Discourses*, 1513–21) that the civilised world could set up a state among the uncivilised using its technological power to mystify them into adoration of the invader. There is something of a paradox here, for it would seem that confirming that religion is just an ideological tool used for political ends would seem to threaten the very European culture itself, since that culture is built on these ideological uses of religion. Greenblatt argued, however, that just this paradox is the key to the containment of the political subversion that Machiavelli's ideas might otherwise promote, for the power that the radical hypothesis threatens to expose (European culture) uses the radical hypothesis to increase its power by colonising Virginia using the same ideological means.

Colonial power is not monolithic because it needs be vigilant and monitor threats to itself, and hence it needs to evaluate what may constitute a threat. The same monitoring goes on in the Henry 4 and Henry 5 plays, according to Greenblatt. Shakespeare astutely represented the operation of containment of subversion in *Henry 4*, in which Prince Hal is both thief and heir to the throne and is leader of an army of misfits who are pressed into defending the state. Hal is not simply redeemed at the end, rather he is constantly redeemed throughout the play by our liking for him and his mischievousness.

Hal is a theatrical prince – he plays roles – and power is, by implication, a matter of performance. The pleasing subversions of *1 Henry 4* become in *2 Henry 4* and *Henry 5* open duplicities and ruthless exercises of power and trickery, forcing reinterpretation of the earlier work as not so much the humanising of the excesses of power (the reading in which the very human Prince Hal grows up and takes responsibility as a man) as a desperate yoking together of the forces (held together by conjuring tricks) which are now shown to be violently destabilising.

In this reading, Hal's learning of tavern language, which had earlier seemed like a bridging of class divisions, now is shown to be his cynical learning of the ways of the poor in order that they may better be controlled. As Warwick prophetically puts it:

> WARWICK
> My gracious lord [Henry 4], you look beyond him [Prince Hal] quite.
> The Prince but studies his companions,
> Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
> 'Tis needful that the most immodest word
> Be looked upon and learnt, which once attained,
> Your highness knows, comes to no further use
> But to be known and hated; so, like gross terms,
> The Prince will in the perfectness of time
> Cast off his followers, and their memory
> Shall as a pattern or a measure live
> By which his grace must mete the lives of other,
> Turning past evils to advantages.
> (*2 Henry 4*, 4.3.67–78)

As we see, Hal does indeed cast off his former companions, and many readers and theatregoers have understood this as a necessary, albeit regrettable, stage in his maturing into king Henry 5. If we take Warwick seriously, on the other hand, Hal was always preparing for this moment and the 'good' King Harry is cast in a troublingly cynical light from the start. In other words, the horrors that he threatens and orders in *Henry 5* can be traced back to before his ascension of the throne.

Perhaps we do not need to decide whether Henry 5 is a good or a bad king because there are aspects of *Henry 5* that would seem to confirm that the play is about the combination of (or, the conflict between) opposites. This is most apparent in the relationship between the play's choruses, which are unrelentingly positive and upbeat, and the dialogue and actions that come between them. A reading of the play based on this contrast was made by Anthony Hammond.[12] Of Shakespeare's plays, Hammond observed, only *Henry 5* and *Pericles* have the elaborate structure of an introductory prologue, choruses before each act, and a concluding epilogue. Critics have tended to see Henry as a great warrior-king because the chorus says he is, but in fact we do not see him being a warrior in the play.

Hammond suggested that Shakespeare included so much Renaissance ideological idealism of the warrior-king deliberately so that the Henry he creates falls short of it. That is to say, Shakespeare is covertly attacking the ideal. The chorus's prologue has two tones of voice, the heroic and the apologetic, and asks the audience to exercise its imagination to make up for the performance's inadequacy. Such imaginative gap-filling is referred to by Theseus watching the mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst no worse if imagination amend them' (5.1.210–11). As discussed in Chapter 1, the audience of *Pyramus and Thisbe* do not exercise the willing use of their imagination to make up for the play's deficiencies, nor do the audience of the pageant of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but these plays need audience indulgence whereas *Henry 5* does not.

Gary Taylor has argued for the prologue and the chorus before 2.1 of *Henry 5* being a deliberate arousal of an expectation only to temporarily frustrate it, but Hammond thought this wrong because there is never an attempt to represent mass confrontation of armies and so the prologue has nothing to apologise for. The prologue promises military exploits and the play then begins with a long debate by the churchmen about the new king's taxation plans. The chorus to Act 2 promises that 'all the youth of England are on fire', that the war is universally popular, and that everyone is behaving honourably, but the next thing the reader reads, or the audience

sees, is tired old Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, and it hears their endless complaining about the war, and then a conspiracy against Henry. Similarly the chorus to Act 3 stresses the military daring of the army, and is followed by Henry's solo speech which is not followed by mass arousal but again by the trudging of tired old Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol.

Thus, the choruses are out of keeping with the rest of the drama. Before the battle of Agincourt, the chorus refers to Harry cheering his troops up as he passes among them, but we see Harry going around his army in disguise, somewhat as Richard 3 does when eavesdropping on his troops (*Richard 3*, 5.3.201–3). Thus there are two problems with the play. The first is the discrepancy between the chorus's description of events and the drama's depiction of them, and the second is Henry's morality and the question of whether or not we are to admire him. For Hammond the good/bad duality of Henry is built into the play: 'Henry is a great hero, and a cold, conniving bastard'.[13] Thus the chorus gives the ideological norm, and the play incorporates this norm and also challenges it.

According to Hammond, Shakespeare has the chorus apologise for the limitations of the stage not because he is really embarrassed but just the opposite: the apology is ironic and works to celebrate the parameters within which drama functions. The play 'attempts to end in closure, but the Chorus's epilogue denies the finality of that closure' and ends instead by 'stressing the transitory nature of Henry's achievement'.[14] We earlier considered as an awkward fact the detail of the tetralogies' order of composition, their being written in a sequence that makes it hard to sustain Tillyard's reading in which Providence is working through English history. In Hammond's account this becomes the central irony that structures Shakespeare's engagement with the genre of history plays: Shakespeare, it seems, wants to undermine this patriotic, chauvinistic tradition.

There is one version of the play *Henry 5* for which this sophisticated reading cannot be sustained: the first quarto edition published in 1600, which omits the choruses. This edition was throughout the twentieth century dismissed as a 'bad' quarto that lacked much of what was in the longer, Folio, version (upon which modern editions are usually based) simply because it was made by

surreptitious means (what is often called 'piracy') by persons who did not have access to the authoritative text. In his edition of the play for Cambridge University Press, Andrew Gurr argued that in fact the quarto represents quite closely the play as it was first performed around 1599.[15] Lukas Erne built upon this basis to argue that the longer, Folio, version represents essentially a text that Shakespeare wrote to be read and that the shorter, quarto, version represents the play as it was meant to be performed.[16] Thus certain lines (Exeter and Gloucester's lines at 4.7.64–5) missing from the quarto and present in the Folio are not needed in performance and exist only to give the reader information that a theatre spectator would get with his eyes.

If Gurr is right that the play's choruses were not spoken in performance, then the call to imagination is not to the playhouse audience but to the reader. Shorn of the problematising and ironising devices that we have been considering, the performed play is the patriotic and jingoistic version, aimed at an audience's emotions not at readers' minds. Starting in the mid-twentieth century there has been a tendency to privilege the performance of Shakespeare over the reading of him, and this tendency is challenged by Erne's insistence that Shakespeare wrote for readers. In the last twenty years or so the 'bad' quartos have been treated with rather more reverence than formerly, with critics arguing that they are viable alternative versions that perhaps (and Gurr's argument about Q1 *Henry 5* takes this idea the furthest) bring us closer to early-modern performance, the medium for which Shakespeare was writing, than the longer 'good' versions.

Edward Pechter will have none of this, and argues in favour of the longer, literary Folio versions of plays precisely because of their 'potential to undermine the hegemonic values of warlike valour, patriarchal authority, and monarchical power'.[17] This will be a pertinent matter in the next chapter too, for like *Henry 5*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* are plays that also exist in distinct early versions that give a sense of Shakespeare's attitudes to war, sexual relations, and government that differ significantly from the impressions we get from the familiar versions of these plays.

It is worth bearing in mind that Erne's insistence that Shakespeare wrote for readers as well as for actors is hotly contested

in Shakespeare studies; if he is right then a lot of what is currently orthodoxy will have to be rethought. Before returning to this, however, we should first see just what two of Shakespeare's tragic heroes – one Danish and often pictured as Aryan, the other Venetian and often pictured as African – have in common that makes them tragic heroes. We shall also consider those aspects on which they differ, and thereby we will attempt to recover a sense of just what Shakespeare's readers and audiences understood by, and expected of, a tragic hero.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The Shakespeare history plays tell a version of English history that has appealed to patriots for their apparent valorisation of the country.
- The versions of Englishness and Britishness constructed by the plays are contestable.
- In one reading, the entire eight-play sequence amounts to a single epic work that shows the standard Christian pattern of a Fall followed by a period of misery (which is God's punishment for the Fall) that ends with Redemption. This is a providential reading and, since the Redemption coincides with the succession of the first Tudor king, Henry 7, it is sometimes called the Tudor Myth.
- An alternative to this providentialist reading might see the plays as showing how particular human actions, and not the hand of God, shape the events of history.
- The order of the composition of the plays can help us choose between the above two readings.
- The play *Henry 5* contains highly problematic material that has to be suppressed if it is to be used (as it was more than once in the twentieth century) as a simple story of English patriotic heroism.
- Early quarto printings of Shakespeare's plays sometimes differ considerably from the later Folio versions, and which one prefers is often a matter of one's critical approach to the material.

NOTES

1. Laurence Olivier's film of *Henry 5* (1944) was released during the D-Day landings in Normandy. In 1984 (two years after the Malvinas/Falklands war) Adrian Noble directed Kenneth Branagh in the role for a Royal Shakespeare Company production. In 2003 Nicholas Hytner directed Adrian Lester as Henry in a National Theatre production that critics universally understood as alluding to the US–UK invasion of Iraq in March of that year.
2. Roy William Neill, dir. *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon*, Universal Pictures, 1943.
3. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943), pp. 100–1.
4. Geoffrey Tillotson, 'Review of E. M. W. Tillyard *Shakespeare's History Plays*' (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), *English*, 5 (1945), 160–1, 160.
5. See Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
6. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Peter Bondanella, trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 59.
7. E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), pp. 21–3.
8. J. P. Brockbank, 'The Frame of Disorder: *Henry VI*', in *Early Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 3 (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 73–99, pp. 82–3.
9. Laurence Olivier, dir. *Henry V*, Two Cities Films, 1944.
10. Janette Dillon, 'Tiring-house Wall Scenes at the Globe: A Change in Style and Emphasis', *Theatre Notebook*, 53 (1999), 163–73, 164.
11. Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*', in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 18–47.

12. Antony Hammond, '"It Must Be Your Imagination Then": The Prologue and the Plural Text in *Henry V* and Elsewhere', in *'Fanned and Winnowed Opinions': Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins*, ed. John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendleton (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 133–50.
13. Ibid., p. 144.
14. Ibid., p. 149.
15. William Shakespeare, *The First Quarto of King Henry V*, ed. Andrew Gurr, The New Cambridge Shakespeare: The Early Quartos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
16. Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 220–44.
17. Edward Pechter, 'What's Wrong with Literature?', *Textual Practice*, 17 (2003), 505–26, 521.

CHAPTER 3

Tragedies: *Hamlet* and *Othello*

There is obviously some kind of link between the state of health of an individual and the state of health of the society of which she is a part; after all, societies are just collections of individuals so this must be true. But is there a relationship here that we can codify, saying how the individual and the group are interconnected? As discussed in Chapter 2, a model that has been offered and received until recently with considerable approval was that of the Elizabethan World Picture in which E. M. W. Tillyard outlined what a typical educated Elizabethan thought about how the world was ordered, the principles of temporal and divine governance, and the relationship between human affairs and the divine scheme. Tillyard saw a general faith in order and stability, manifested in an imagined Great Chain of Being that allocated everything its place in a coherent structure, a hierarchy, that ultimately led to God. From lowest to highest, each element of the universe is linked to the others by this chain and is pulled from above and below. In particular, the monarch was supposed to be God's deputy on earth, the binding link between heavenly and earthly order, and duty to one's monarch was a religious obligation.

Tillyard's model recognises a contradiction at its heart, between inherited medieval ideas (especially the religious injunction to contemn the world) and the humanism emerging since the twelfth century: 'The two contradictory principles co-existed in a state of high tension'.[1] The World Picture was not monolithic but rather a

site of contestation as the work of Machiavelli and Copernicus[2] provided new reasons to reject traditional ideas and the ruling dynasty sought to marshal ideological support for its own rule: 'Somehow the Tudors had inserted themselves into the constitution of the medieval universe'.[3]

Tillyard thought that the World Picture he described was under attack in Shakespeare's time, and as its tidy categories increasingly failed to fit reality the 'equivalences shaded off into resemblances'; nonetheless the model was used 'to tame a bursting and pullulating world'.[4] The strongest pressure came from newer truths: astronomy 'had by then broken the fiction of the eternal and immutable heavens' by revealing imperfections in the sun and planets.[5] The World Picture was, then, part of the intellectual equipment with which one might make sense of a rapidly changing, confusing early modern world.

LARGE AND SMALL AFFAIRS IN *HAMLET*

On the first page of his book, Tillyard quoted Hamlet's expression of where humans fit in Creation:

> [HAMLET] What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god – the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!
> (2.2.305–9)

Tillyard commented that this was the standard model, was 'in the purest medieval tradition', and shows 'Shakespeare placing man in the traditional cosmic setting between the angels and the beasts'.[6] Having located humankind in this place within the wider order, the World Picture is rather more intellectually liberating than Tillyard's detractors have tended to argue. Because there is a system of correspondences between the 'planes' of existence in the model it is possible to make analogies between what happens at the local level around us and what happens in the wider universe.

Such analogising in the pursuit of philosophy (which means the love, *philo-*, of truth, *-sophy*) has a long tradition. In his book *The Republic* (*c.* 375BCE) Plato used an analogy to justify a mode of social analysis that made sense of the big picture first:

> Imagine a rather short-sighted person told to read an inscription in small letters from some way off. He would think it a godsend if someone pointed out that the same inscription was written up elsewhere on a bigger scale, so that he could first read the larger characters and then make out whether the smaller ones were the same . . . So I suggest that we should begin by inquiring what justice means in a state. Then we can go on to look for its counterpart on the smaller scale of the individual.[7]

Notice that Plato does not assume that the same thing will be found at the smaller scale ('he could . . . then make out *whether* the smaller ones were the same'), so what is being described is a heuristic, a means of progressing that does not assume a known outcome.

Plato's image of a heuristic for discovering the nature of justice is apt here because aside from giving pleasure one of the alleged goods that theatre has been credited with is the exploration of key social notions such as justice, honour, good governance, sexuality, and the relations between the sexes. One way to approach the entire phenomenon of London Renaissance theatre from its inception in 1576 to its prohibition in 1642 is to think of it as the collective exploration of those key social notions and as a forum where the forces that eventually led to the English Revolution could shape representations of crises in fictive worlds so that writers and audiences could collectively examine the urgent issues of the day.

In such an examination, the issues might for safety's sake – that is, to evade censorship – be projected to other times and other places, so the plays are set in countries other than England and in times other than the present. It is noticeable that only one of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is set in the England of his time; the rest are set in distant lands or the distant past, or both. And yet they all contain elements that speak of

Shakespeare's time and place: ancient Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the supposed birthplace of democracy, is ruled by a Duke, the kind of local leader his audience would recognise from their own lives, and Richard 2 travels to Ireland to put down a rebellion, which mirrors events happening in England and Ireland when the play was first performed. We might dismiss these things as careless anachronisms, but it is fruitful to explore whether the connections between the place and time represented and the place and time doing the representing have elements in common that illuminate the concerns of the play. As we shall see, Hamlet certainly believes that putting on a play, a falsehood, can reveal a concealed truth in the present.

Plato famously rejected drama, poetry, and most forms of storytelling in *The Republic* precisely because they are necessarily falsehoods and hence are bad for people. This view had some currency in Shakespeare's time and there was no shortage of anti-theatricalists ready to decry not only the scripts but also the venues of Renaissance drama. The sermoniser John Stockwood called the Theatre in Shoreditch a 'gorgeous playing place' and another, Thomas White, referred to the 'sumptuous theatre houses'.[8] The buildings themselves seem to have been highly decorated, with the interior wooden surfaces painted to look like marble and so convincingly executed that the work was 'able to deceive the most enquiring' (literally, the 'nosiest') person who looked at it ('nasutissimos quoque fallere possent'), as Johannes de Witt said of The Swan theatre.[9] The point of marbleisation was to imitate the great theatres of the classical age and it worked: Stockwood could see that The Theatre was 'after the manner of the old heathenish Theatre at Rome'.

The theatre, then, was simultaneously a place of truth and falsehood, indeed of truth revealed by falsehood, and this principle was encoded in the very fabric of the place as a composite of Tudor vernacular architectural style and Italian neo-classicism. This fact complicates Tillyard's assertion that Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is a man!' is the standard medieval view rather than being the epitome of Renaissance humanism, because Hamlet gives his encomium as a depressive who is discontent with the world around him:

> [HAMLET] I have of late – but
> wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all
> custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with
> my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems
> to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy
> the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging, this majestical
> roof fretted with golden fire – why, it appears no other
> thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of
> vapours. What a piece of work is a man!
> (2.2.297–305)

Hamlet seems to be describing Denmark and the wider world, which fits in with the model of interlinking spheres described by Tillyard, but in fact he is describing the theatre in which he is standing.

In an open-air amphitheatre of Shakespeare's time, the venue was a 'goodly frame', the stage was indeed a 'promontory' that jutted out into a 'sea' of upturned spectatorial faces, the cover over the stage called the 'heavens' was a 'most excellent canopy' and a 'brave [that is, handsome] o'erhanging' and the underside of its 'majestical roof' was usually subdivided into panels ('fretted') in which were painted the sun, moon, and heavenly bodies ('golden fire'). Hamlet's fictive world has shrunk to the scale of the theatre (called The Globe) in which that world is created, so the whole speech might seem like an ironic collapsing of the extrapolation that makes drama. And yet, as Hamlet says, this is how the world 'seems' to him because he has lost his mirth, and humans (for all his acknowledgement that they are the paragon of animals) are just the 'quintessence of dust' (2.2.310). To make clear that this is about theatre, Rosencrantz laughs and says, 'To think . . . what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you' (2.2.317–19).

Hamlet has, of course, said that he will fake madness so we do not have to treat this as how he actually feels. We should notice, though, that faked or real Hamlet's alienation from the world and those around him is imaged as an inability to treat the drama that he is in as a drama, an inability to take the theatre for the world. This inability could be understood as undermining theatre's capacity to represent the whole world, to extrapolate, in the opposite

direction from Plato, from the small and local to the wider world. If the Elizabethans thought about correspondences between the various planes of existence (such as the body, the family, the state, and the heavens) in the way that Tillyard described, then (eschewing Hamlet's own diminished perspective) we should look for some kind of wider disturbance that matches Hamlet's melancholy and madness.

Andrew Gurr found the wider disturbance in the mad, but calculating, Claudian court from which it is only rational to feel utterly alienated. This is a nice (in the literal sense of intricate) paradox of the kind explored in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* (1961): in a mad situation to stay reasonable would be madness and if one becomes mad one simply fits into the mad world all the more securely. For Gurr, Shakespeare captures this in the image of Hamlet clutching his head and answering the ghost 'Remember thee? | Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat | In this distracted globe' (1.5.95–7):

> The sphere he inhabits, the earthly globe, must be lunatic too if such things can happen in it. The world is not the moral and rational place that it should be . . . Crime is a form of insanity, since to destroy good and distract the world from its moral courses calls for an inversion of true reason. To invert moral values is ultimately insane, says Hamlet.[10]

Of course the 'distracted globe' is also the Globe theatre audience, distracted from their working lives in this illicit pleasure of going to the theatre in the afternoon when they should be at their work. In the judgement and especially the memory of the audience lie the hopes for a rational, albeit tragic, outcome. The act of remembering is at the heart of revenge tragedy because those involved refuse to forget a past wrong, and forgetting is at the heart of comedy because the characters decide to forget and thus forgive.

Hamlet's 'distraction' is strongly indicated by Shakespeare even before he learns of Claudius's crimes from the ghost of his father:

HAMLET
O that this too too solid flesh would melt,

> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God,
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> (1.2.129–34)

This sounds like his later melancholy but it is motivated only by the mental comparison of the father he has lost with the stepfather he has gained: 'Hyperion to a satyr . . . married with mine uncle' (1.2.140–51). Just whether that remarriage would strike an early-modern audience as unseemly is hard to determine, and certainly to call it incest, as Hamlet and the ghost repeatedly do (1.2.157, 1.5.42, 1.5.83, 3.3.90, 5.2.276), goes beyond English law then or now. Importantly, the 'news' that Hamlet learns from the ghost of his father – that Claudius actually killed Hamlet Senior – only confirms what Hamlet has already suspected: 'O my prophetic soul!' (1.5.41). In the play there is a distinct theme of knowing that something is wrong, but not knowing what it is.

This premonitionary theme begins in the opening moments, as in broad daylight two actors perform what the script prescribes:

> *Enter Barnardo and Francisco, two sentinels, at several doors*
> BARNARDO Who's there?
> FRANCISCO Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.
> (1.1.0–2)

It being 2 p.m. on a summer's afternoon in south London, about fifty metres from the Thames, we have to suppose that the actors are pretending not to see one another and hence that the audience are to understand the scene taking place at night and in winter in Denmark. It is commonly claimed that the opening moments show a failure of military protocol since the relieving sentinel, Barnardo, challenges the sentinel on duty, Francisco, rather than (as protocol is supposed to dictate) the man on duty making the challenge. This is not so: the audience has no means to tell who is relieving whom, they are both sentinels (and hence entitled to challenge anyone, whether or not their official duty has

started), and indeed once Franscisco is relieved he (despite being now off duty) nonetheless challenges the approaching Horatio and Marcellus.

The point of the opening moments is not a detail of military protocol, but the creation of a general sense of unease that is explained when Horatio answers Marcellus's question about why the military industry of Denmark has gone on a production drive (1.1.69–106): there is a conflict brewing. When the ghost appears, almost Horatio's first thought is that it could be connected with the wider political and military events:

> [HORATIO] If thou art privy to thy country's fate
> Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
> O speak! (1.1.114–16).

As a disturbance in nature, the ghost could be the means by which the supernatural intervenes in the natural to restore order, which of course to Danes means the elimination of the threat from Norway. Unless we are to think the audiences hooted at Horatio's naivety, we have to accept that this supposed relationship between affairs affecting the cosmological order (for the ghost obviously has returned from somewhere beyond the Earth) and affairs affecting Earthly politics was at least in the realm of the believable, even if not actually believed. Moreover, it was plausible for the relationship to be causal with a direction of effect from the lesser to the greater: the petty affairs of Danes and Norwegians have prompted a response from the wider universe.

However, it must be added that this is only one of Horatio's immediate thoughts, and he also entertains the possibility that the ghost is merely troubled for its own reasons:

> [HORATIO]
> Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
> Extorted treasure in the womb of earth –
> For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death –
> *The cock crows*
> Speak of it, stay and speak
> (1.1.117–20)

In the tradition of supernatural happenings in political dramas, we should expect that the ghost comes because terrible things threaten the state, but in fact this other guess of Horatio's is right. In a brilliant twist, Shakespeare has the ghost of the old king return not for his country's sake, but because he has a family score to settle: his brother killed him and stole his crown and his queen. For this reason, theatre directors have been able to cut the play to remove entirely the narrative strand of Fortinbras and his rebellion, ending the action with Hamlet's death.

Just what, then, is the relation between the small, dynastic matter of Hamlet Senior's battle with his brother and the larger battle of the neighbour kingdoms of Denmark and Norway? To think of it in slightly different terms, how do the private matters relate to the public ones? The answer depends on what we make of this ghost, for as Horatio's several responses indicate it is difficult to know what to make of him. It seems clear that the ghost is seen by Marcellus, Bernardo, and Horatio – he is not a figment of their imaginations – but the fact that the ghost communes only with Hamlet and it is only he who can subsequently see the ghost suggests that to an extent the dramatic viewpoint is, at some points, reduced to the subjectivity of Hamlet's perception. Furthermore, Hamlet's subsequent (if not consequent) madness – which at first we are supposed to take as entirely faked – comes to look so convincing that our faith in his judgement is shaken. With uncertainty about Hamlet's state of mind comes an uncertainty about the political state of Denmark since he is the source of much of the adverse comment upon Claudius's court.

There is much evidence in the play to support an argument that Denmark under Claudius is as 'distracted' as Hamlet's mind. Claudius's confession of murder compounds the immorality of his marrying his dead brother's wife. In *Hamlet and the Distracted Globe* (1978), Andrew Gurr treated these two deeds as the central crimes in what he considers to be the madness of the Claudian Globe, meaning the deranged world of amoral political manoeuvring. It is the oppressive burden of being responsible for righting this situation (becoming God's scourge) that Gurr claimed drives Hamlet to distraction. Thus, for Gurr, the madness works its way into Hamlet from a mad external world. This explanation has an appeal for

Marxists and (some) Freudians alike, for it treats human personality as something essentially malleable and worked upon by wider social forces and so gives those who would theorise the wider social structures a justification for putting the big things right: society has to be healthy for individuals to be healthy.

In the long term an unhealthy society cannot survive, as Marxist critic Terry Eagleton quoted Freud observing: '. . . a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them to revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence'.[11] It is important to realise that we are here still in the conceptual domain mapped out by Plato for this kind of discussion about the relationship between virtue in the individual and virtue in society, but that the direction of causality has reversed: rather than to write large the known virtuous individual to make the hoped-for virtuous society, the Marxist (and, Eagleton convincingly argued, the Freudian) wants to perfect the society because its condition gets written small in the individual.

SEX, SUICIDE, AND SCEPTICISM

One can find objections to this explanation of Hamlet's state, however. As the Freudian would be quick to point out, whatever else society has done to Hamlet, he has some hangups of his own that seem local and specific. Most significantly, he is obsessed with his mother's sex life and imagines it vividly:

> HAMLET Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
> Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty –
> (3.4.81–4)

Picturing the parental bed as sweaty, dirty, and perhaps even stained with Claudius's semen is an extraordinary image to keep to one's self, and it is no wonder that speaking it aloud to his mother has given directors cause to suspect that Hamlet is incestuously jealous of his uncle. However, Hamlet showed himself willing to speak with

remarkable sexual vulgarity in 3.2, as we saw in the first chapter (pp. 36–7 above). We will return to this 'mousetrap' scene (3.2) shortly to discuss the differences between reading it and watching it, and even more interestingly the difference between reading it and performing in it.

Where does Hamlet's peculiar sexual vulgarity come from? We might be tempted to put it down to his feigned madness, especially once we have seen Ophelia's apparently real madness manifest itself in similar (but much less extreme) sexual vulgarity in song:

> [OPHELIA (*sings*)]
> Quoth she 'Before you tumbled me,
> You promised me to wed.'
> So would I 'a' done, by yonder sun,
> An thou hadst not come to my bed.
> (4.5.62–5)

With madness, it seems, comes a frankness about sexual matters that, to use Freud's terminology, is normally repressed in polite society. But what if Ophelia is here hinting that she is pregnant, and thus that Hamlet, in rejecting her, has done her a greater wrong than is usually assumed? Having another life inside her would give Ophelia a complicated set of imperatives, for her own interests are now intertwined with the interests of another who temporarily inhabits the same body. In this peculiar situation there can arise conflicts of interest which a pregnant woman might experience as literally internalised: a part of her own body seemingly has turned against her.

Whether or not we suppose that audiences are to think that Ophelia is pregnant, the play is much concerned with such internalised conflicts arising from exterior conflicts. Discussing Ophelia's death, the two clowns who dig her grave make sense of her apparent suicide by means of just such an internal self division:

> *Enter two Clowns* [*carrying a spade and a pickaxe*]
> FIRST CLOWN Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?
> SECOND CLOWN I tell thee she is, and therefore make her grave straight. The coroner hath sat on her, and finds

Christian burial.
FIRST CLOWN How can that be unless she drowned herself in her own defence?
SECOND CLOWN Why, 'tis found so.
(5.1.1–8)

The first clown is thinking of suicide as self-directed homicide. The only justification for homicide is that it was committed in self-defence and hence Ophelia is not guilty of her own murder if she can be considered as two people in one; the first of whom killed the second. In performance the idea of a self-defensive suicide often raises laughter, and indeed the Arden editors Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor found it 'comically inappropriate'.[12] Yet, this sense of madness as an internal self-division is echoed in the next scene by Hamlet in excusing himself to Laertes:

[HAMLET]
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If 't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.
(5.2.180–4)

Treated by Shakespeare comically and seriously in quick succession, this sense of self-division is the type of condition explored by psychoanalysts researching the nature of grief and childhood anxiety.

For example, psychoanalytical theorist Melanie Klein had the following to say about the impulses that lead a depressive to suicide once they have internalised something bad from the outside world, something Klein calls an 'introjected object':

. . . suicide is directed against the introjected object. But, while in committing suicide the ego intends to murder its bad objects, in my view at the same time it also always aims at saving its loved objects, internal or external. To put it shortly: in some cases the phantasies underlying suicide aim at

> preserving the internalized good objects and that part of the ego which is identified with good objects, and also at destroying the other part of the ego which is identified with the bad objects and the id. Thus the ego is enabled to become united with its loved objects.[13]

This accurately describes the self-splitting which the first clown alludes to: Ophelia quite literally kills herself in self-defence. The introjected object referred to is, in this case, the 'truth' about Hamlet and the good object to be preserved is her previous faith in his good intentions. Klein's presentation of the good/bad division being more significant to the subject than the internal/external division fits well with an Elizabethan acceptance of the microcosm/macrocosm correspondence, and is a useful corrective to the widespread misconception that psychoanalysis is concerned only with the interior world of the individual.

Suicide is of course on Hamlet's mind too. Even before he learns that it was murder, his grief at his father's death makes him think of doing away with himself:

> HAMLET
> O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!
> (1.2.129–32)

It is commonly argued that Shakespeare's most famous speech is about suicide too, and in a sense it is but we must be careful not to oversimplify it:

> *Enter Prince Hamlet*
> HAMLET To be, or not to be; that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And, by opposing, end them.
> (3.1.58–62)

The easily overlooked part of this opposition of being and not being is that Hamlet sees an opportunity for active resistance that cannot fail: taking arms in a suicidal attack on one's enemy. This will either kill the enemy or it will not, but either way 'by opposing' one ends one's troubles in death. In a sense that modern politicians seldom seem to grasp, the suicidal opponent cannot lose. This sense of active suicidal attack is present across the entire genre of revenge tragedies, from Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (first performed 1582–92) to Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (first performed 1606–7), in which the hero has to right a wrong that is done to him (usually the murder of a loved one) but in the process must himself die. The wider, macrocosmic theme to explore in this genre is the hero's usurpation of God's monopoly on retributive justice, which 'over-reaching' must itself receive divine punishment of the revenger.

There is more to say about Hamlet's famous speech, quoted above, starting with the fact that contrary to popular usage it is not a soliloquy. This term 'soliloquy' has no currency in the period so we must be careful to avoid anachronism in using it. Surely, however, the idea that is at the heart of the term – that of 'speaking alone' (*solus-* plus *-loqui*) – operated in the drama of the time. Arguably not, since on an open-air amphitheatre stage that surrounded the actor on all sides by spectators even a single actor alone on the stage might not have felt alone in the way that one can on the stage of a proscenium-arch theatre in which powerful footlights make the audience all but invisible. But even leaving the performance venue aside for a moment, there is a serious objection to calling this a soliloquy, which is that Shakespeare simply has not called for Hamlet to be alone. Ophelia is undoubtedly on the stage at this moment, and Claudius and Polonius are hiding somewhere nearby so that although they cannot see Hamlet they can hear him. This is much more obvious in performance than in reading of the scene, for in reading it is easy to attend so closely to the complexity of what a character is saying that one forgets the presence of those who have not left but have faded from the mind because they have not spoken for a while.

Let us look at what Hamlet goes on to say in this speech:

[HAMLET] To die, to sleep –
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to – 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished . . .
. . . Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
(3.1.66–84)

W. J. Lawrence long ago pointed out that it is peculiar for Hamlet to be here talking about death as a place from which no-one returns, since he has recently heard from the ghost of his father who has done precisely that. Also, it is odd to hear Hamlet talking of 'the law's delay, | The insolence of office, and the spurns | That patient merit of th' unworthy takes' for these are things of which, as prince of Denmark, he can have had no direct experience whatsoever. For Lawrence these are 'thoughts uttered in a vacuum' and it is 'humanity at large that is voicing its grievances, not Hamlet'. Lawrence thought that the text as we have it has been subject to a revision and that the 'To be or not to be' speech was originally placed where 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt' is now (1.2.129–59), where Hamlet's conviction that no-one comes back from the dead had not yet been challenged by the appearance of the ghost.[14]

Lawrence assumed that Hamlet is in this speech speaking what he believes, but perhaps he is not. Recalling that Hamlet is not alone, we can explore the matter of whether he knows just who is around him. Suppose he enters this scene in perfect knowledge that Ophelia has been sent to waylay him and that her father and the king are straining to hear the encounter. James Hirsh argued that 'To be or not to be . . .' cannot be an honest account of Hamlet's contemplation.[15] Since others at Elsinore might easily see the ghost and guess why his father's spirit is unquiet, Hamlet needs to convince Claudius that he does not believe in ghosts and that in any

case he is too conflicted to act. This his soliloquy achieves, but Hirsh saw this as a brilliant distraction by Hamlet, who having been 'sent . . . Hither' (3.1.31) is bound to have guessed who is listening in. After all, if Hamlet were sincere would he really have failed to look around the place to which his deadly enemy has summoned him (and thus find Ophelia immediately), and really have spoken his innermost thoughts aloud? The scene makes best sense if Hamlet is throwing Ophelia, Claudius, and Polonius off the scent, just as he threw off Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with talk of inexplicable melancholy and sterile promontories when he discovered that they were sent for. Directors and actors in the thrall of the common misconception of the scene (which for Hirsh derives from the virtuoso acting tradition dating back to Thomas Betterton) take steps to correct its consequences, and hence in Laurence Olivier's 1948 film version 'To be or not to be . . .' is performed entirely alone and comes after (indeed, is caused by) the 'get thee to a nunnery' exchange with Ophelia.[16]

Hirsh is certainly right that Olivier's film greatly affected late twentieth-century responses to the play. The opening narration describes the story as being one of 'a man who could not make up his mind', which as Kay A. Smith described is in fact a summary of the plot given by the sailor Michael Taylor (played by Gary Cooper) when asked what the play he is reading, *Hamlet*, is about, in the film *Souls at Sea* (1937).[17] And yet, Hamlet does seem to accuse himself of having wasted time when the ghost appears to him in Gertrude's chamber:

> HAMLET (*to the Ghost*)
> Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
> That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
> Th' important acting of your dread command?
> (3.4.97–9)

And the ghost seems to agree that the sharp edge of Hamlet's passion for revenge seems to have dulled: 'This visitation | Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose' (3.4.100–1). However, this is not the same thing as being unable to make up one's mind: Hamlet has scarcely been unsure what to do.

For Olivier, the key speech of the play is Hamlet's description of the manner in which a single fault damns a man: 'So, oft it chances in particular men | That, for some vicious mole of nature in them . . . Shall in the general censure take corruption | From that particular fault' (Additional Passage B, lines 7–20). Olivier's film begins with a cut and slightly reworded version of this speech, spoken by Olivier over the title music while the words are displayed on the screen, and as they fade Olivier's narration delivers the crisp summary of this as a story about indecision. Although it is notoriously obscure, the point of this speech seems to be that we may be remembered harshly ('the general censure') for a single small fault among many virtues, just as the Danes are remembered for their heavy drinking despite their better qualities.

It is clear that Olivier thought this play to be essentially a personal tragedy about a fault (or perhaps faults) within Hamlet leading to his catastrophe. Indeed, Olivier's great interest in psychoanalytical interpretation of the play led him to recruit Freud's disciple and biographer Ernest Jones to consult on the film. Jones had published an influential essay that used Freud's Oedipus-Complex theory to explain Hamlet's motivation, and as a result of his influence upon Olivier the film used strongly sexualised imagery, for example in Gertrude's bed being draped in material that fell into a shape of a giant vagina.[18]

Because Olivier saw the play in essentially personal terms – Hamlet's fault, not society – his Elsinore is populated not by a community but by a family: there hardly seem to be enough people around to carry out the menial tasks of the court. By contrast, in Russian director Grigori Kosintsev's film (1964), Danish society impinges harshly on the minds of Hamlet and Ophelia to generate their instability, and thus there has to be a society beyond the royal family.[19] Thus in the scene of Hamlet's return to Elsinore castle for the burial of his father and the marriage of his mother, the drawbridge and portcullis of the castle are raised after his entrance by the manual labour of eight workers on a capstan. The slow movement of the drawbridge and portcullis emphasise the effort of these workers. Kosintsev's Elsinore is heavily populated by ordinary people, and Claudius's proclamation of his marriage is read publicly before a crowd. Here, in pictorial form, we have the contrast

between a bourgeois, individualist conception of tragedy, and a socialist, collective conception of tragedy.

It is hard to see why Olivier thought that Hamlet could not make up his mind, since the sole point at issue is whether to trust the ghost. Even before it spoke to Hamlet, Horatio pointed out that it might not be what it seemed (1.4.50–5). Hamlet will have none of these fears and follows the ghost, to be told in private the ghost's account of the death of Hamlet Senior. Hamlet we know has recently been studying at the university in Wittenberg, and one thing we may be sure of was that this struck the first audiences as significant. Wittenberg was the very intellectual home of the European Christian Reformation, being the place where Martin Luther, a professor at the university, was supposed in 1517 to have posted on the wooden door of the castle church his ninety-five theses. Central to Luther's attack on church doctrine was his insistence that its profit-and-loss model of redemption was absurd and corrupt. Official doctrine held that those who died with good deeds overweighing their bad generated a surplus credit that the church could, for a fee (an 'indulgence') transfer to the account of a sinner who died in arrears and was languishing in the holding station of purgatory while his sins were burned away in preparation for entry into heaven. Luther rejected the whole book-keeping analogy for sins and one's standing with God, and with it he rejected the notion of purgatory.

As students from Wittenberg, Horatio and Hamlet belong to the sixteenth century and not before, since the university was founded only fifteen years before Luther's rebellion. In other words, those in the audience who caught the reference to Wittenberg would necessarily associate it with the innovations of Lutheranism, and thus Horatio and Hamlet would be expected to have particular, sceptical views on purgatory's place in the afterlife. Indeed upon the ghost's first appearance in the play the soldier Marcellus calls upon the student to exercise his special power: 'Thou art a scholar – speak to it, Horatio' (1.1.37–40). Horatio cannot conceive of an ordinary, theological reason that a man might return from the dead and so he must find a grand explanation in which Danish affairs invokes the interest of the wider cosmos: 'This bodes some strange eruption to our state' (1.1.68).

When the ghost reappears the following night, it explains itself in theological terms that must challenge what Hamlet was taught at university:

> GHOST
> I am thy father's spirit,
> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confined to fast in fires
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away.
> (1.5.9–13)

There is in this a clear contradiction set up by Shakespeare between an old (Catholic) theology, embodied in an old man called Hamlet, and a new (Protestant) theology absorbed by his son of the same name, and now confronted by the shock of encountering the old. Naturally, Hamlet is not sure whether to believe the ghost's account: 'The spirit that I have seen | May be the devil, and the devil hath power | T' assume a pleasing shape' (2.2.600–3). Is this the new Protestant scepticism? The story as told by Shakespeare is never so explicit, and remains intelligible simply as a ghost story. The uncertainty, though, is not so much a matter of Hamlet making up his mind, it is not mere indecision, but rather is ontological: what *is* the ghost and can it be trusted?

TESTING THE SUPERNATURAL

Hamlet devises a test to decide whether the ghost's account is to be believed, which is to have actors perform the murder described by the ghost for a court entertainment and to watch Claudius's reaction. It is easy to read this as a test that Claudius fails, but there are performative exercises one can undertake that offer a more complex view. Each of a group of performers takes a role in this scene and is asked to think only in terms of what her character knows at this point in the play – that is, to exclude information gained by other characters in scenes at which she was not present. The details would be disputable, of course, but a key feature would be that apart

from Hamlet and Horatio no-one present in the scene (including the guilty parties) knows anything of the ghost, and that only Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius, and perhaps Polonius have any inkling how the old king died. This conditions how the characters in the 'mousetrap' scene can be expected to make sense of the behaviour of Hamlet and Claudius. As we have seen, Hamlet speaks in a shockingly crude way towards Ophelia, and this is all the more indecorous because it is done in front of her father Polonius. We might (and actors do) wonder what each of the characters in the scene makes of that behaviour.

One of the famous peculiarities of the scene is that Claudius makes no response to the silent representation of the action of the play-within-the-play (3.2.129–30). If Claudius is to be discomfited by a dramatic enactment of his crime, his non-reaction here is strange. We might suppose that the action is not clear – after all Ophelia immediately asks 'What means this, my lord?' – but critics have been much exercised by Claudius's non-reaction[20] and directors have felt the need to invent plausible explanations for it, as for example in Franco Zeffirelli's film of the play (1990) Claudius is too busy kissing and stroking Gertrude to notice what is happening in the performance.[21]

Throughout the performance that follows, Hamlet makes frequent interjections that are irritating in a typically adolescent way. Shakespeare has aristocratic audiences interrupt and mock actors in the inset performances in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and we might suppose that as an experienced actor himself he resented such behaviour. There is little sign that the rest of the royal party is becoming irritated with his running commentary, but perhaps once the murderer enters and Hamlet explains that 'This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King' (3.2.232) Claudius himself has cause to be offended, for of course Hamlet is likewise nephew to a king.

Indeed, the moment that is often taken as Claudius's incriminating alarm at the action of the play that he is watching might just as easily be read as his annoyance at Hamlet's commentary:

> HAMLET A poisons him i' th' garden for 's estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant, and writ in choice

Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the
love of Gonzago's wife.
OPHELIA The King rises.
HAMLET What, frighted with false fire?
QUEEN GERTRUDE (*to Claudius*) How fares my lord?
POLONIUS Give o'er the play.
KING CLAUDIUS Give me some light. Away.
[COURTIERS] Lights, lights, lights! *Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio*
(3.2.249–58)

Hamlet's commentary likens the represented action to recent events in the Danish court, but with himself, Hamlet, as the murderer and wooer of the queen. This Claudius may easily take as a threat, not a vision of the past. But for Hamlet this moment confirms Claudius's guilt, and thus confirms the ghost's story.

What do the other characters make of these events? It is a useful activity to go through the characters watching the inset play and work out what they could possibly think they have just seen. In each case, it is very hard to see how any character but Hamlet could be convinced of Claudius's guilt from his behaviour, since without an inkling that the old king was murdered the possibility of interpreting Claudius's actions in this way simply cannot arise. Indeed, there is nothing in their subsequent conversations to suggest that anyone in the Danish court discovers Claudius's guilt by his rising, and even Claudius himself gives no indication that he suspects that Hamlet (or anyone else) has learnt anything from this scene.

Hamlet, however, is ecstatic at what he takes to be confirmation of Claudius's guilt, but even Horatio – who knows what the ghost claims – seems non-committal in his answers (3.2.276–8). We are bound, then, to wonder why when reading the play it is so easy to take up Hamlet's position and to judge everything from his perspective. Shakespeare gives us the opportunity to remain sceptical about Hamlet and indeed to wonder if the story is not, as Olivier had it in his 1948 film version, about a man who suffers from indecision but rather about a man who suffers from over-confidence in his own judgements.

Yet Claudius did do it, and so Hamlet is quite right to believe the ghost. If Claudius's guilt were not subsequently made plain by his confession, we would have reason to go back and interrogate Hamlet's spurious certainty. Because Claudius is guilty, it seems that the play's invitation to side with Hamlet (and he is likeable in many ways) includes overlooking the flimsy basis for his certainty. One could usefully explore the play as an interrogation of the basis for beliefs, in which of course the basis for religious belief – and how one chooses which branch to follow within the schismatic religion that Christianity had become – would be a central matter.

Having confirmed the ghost's story, it seems that Hamlet accepts the Catholic profit-and-loss model of divine credits too, for when about to kill Claudius at prayer he is stopped by a scruple:

> *He* [*Claudius*] *kneels* [*to pray*].
> *Enter Prince Hamlet behind him*
> HAMLET Now might I do it pat, now a is praying,
> And now I'll do 't, [*He draws his sword*] and so a goes to heaven,
> And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> O, this is hire and salary, not revenge!
> (3.3.72–9)

Catholic doctrine taught the sacrament of penance: the sinner expresses sincere contrition for her sins, which are confessed to a priest who absolves them and prescribes acts of penance (prayers and good works) to square one's account with God.

No sin is too great for this process, but it requires the priest to perform the sacrament and thus those who die unexpectedly are denied it. This is precisely what the ghost complains of in Act 1 (1.5.74–9). It is the burning away of these unconfessed sins that the ghost is suffering in purgatory. Clearly, none of his sins was of the serious kind, the mortal sin, that cuts the sinner off from God's grace and (unless first cleared by the sacrament of penance) condemns the sinner to hell after death.

Although the sacrament of penance requires a priest, most interpreters of Catholic theology held that the essential part of the process was the sincere contrition and that if the sorrow was motivated by the love of God (perfect contrition) rather than fear of punishment, then contrition alone was enough to remove guilt. In case the audience were not entirely familiar with the theological subtleties at work here, Hamlet himself, standing behind Claudius at prayer and pondering the murder, spells it out. It is worth noticing in particular the profit-and-loss (that is, book-keeping) metaphors at work in all this, such as hire, salary, reckoning, account, and audit:

> [HAMLET]
> A took my father grossly, full of bread,
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
> And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
> But in our circumstance and course of thought
> 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
> To take him in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
> No. *He sheathes his sword*
> (3.3.80–7)

Critics have been appalled at this cold calculation of Hamlet's in order to extend his vengeance beyond this mortal realm and actually catch Claudius's soul. After all, can there be divine justice in a theological doctrine that allows such cold calculations to be made, that lets one man's external damnation be plotted by another? We might want to read this as something of a criticism of Catholic doctrine.

As it turns out, Hamlet is wrong to think that Claudius is making a perfect contrition: 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. | Words without thoughts never to heaven go' (3.3.97–8). By his own admission, Claudius is going through the motions (or rather, the interior verbalisation) of repentance but cannot bring his mind into conformity with them, cannot sincerely repent. This is marvellously ironic, for it means that Hamlet could have killed Claudius at that moment with all his sins upon his head. What 'saves' Claudius, as it were, is Hamlet's mistaking of imperfect contrition

for perfect contrition. We might almost say that were Hamlet to have a lower opinion of Claudius – to have realised that Claudius, like Marlowe's Doctor Faustus of Wittenberg, cannot repent – he might have achieved his end. What kind of topsy-turvy world is it, the play seems to ask, that denies Hamlet's revenge because he has too high an opinion of his adversary? Looked at from this angle, we are again returned to the question of whether tragedy is about the individual, instanced in Hamlet's faulty judgement, or the wider world that makes such calamities follow from the individual fault.

As readers and audiences we too might have thought Claudius was praying, so that whatever he deserves is no more than we deserve. As Hamlet points out ('Use every man after his desert, and who should scape whipping?' 2.2.232–3), in a strict accountancy-like weighing of desert we are all doomed, and the play seems to bear this out. This ought to give us pause to consider the nature of tragedy itself, for it so often forces us to make judgements about desert while at the same time showing that such judgements cannot be reasonable. Perhaps the problem lies in the way that these judgements have tended to do what I have been doing and put the individual and society into opposition in order to ask 'who is to blame?' Since societies are only collections of individuals, that was always a suspect rhetorical manoeuvre. We can see why by comparing *Hamlet* with what is sometimes referred to as Shakespeare's only domestic tragedy.

THE CHARACTER OF OTHELLO IN ISOLATION

In *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), A. C. Bradley conducted an ingenious thought experiment in wondering what would happen if Othello were to meet Claudius, and if Hamlet were to meet Iago:

> There is practically no doubt that *Othello* was the tragedy written next after *Hamlet* . . . There is, further . . . a certain resemblance in the subjects. The heroes of the two plays are doubtless extremely unlike, so unlike that each could have dealt without much difficulty with the situation that proved fatal to the other; but still each is a man exceptionally

noble and trustful, and each endures the shock of a terrible disillusionment.[22]

Bradley's approach to drama is distinctly unfashionable in its attention to character above all else. The wittiest retort to his approach is L. C. Knights's essay 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' in which he argued that the important thing is how the reader 'responds' to the overall effect of the words.[23] That is, plays are made of verbal constructions not psychological ones. Knights has a point, but we should not forget that actors have to work in terms of human personality, since they have to mimic it, and that even if they agree that at root personality is conveyed by words they will point out that in performance there are essential non-verbal elements to be settled such as gesture, deportment, demeanour, and sequences of action they call 'business'.

To go along with Bradley's approach for a while, then, let us ask what is Othello's character? This is not an idle question to those within the play, because from almost the beginning the matter of his character – his honesty, trustworthiness, his 'quality' – is in dispute. In the opening scene Iago's and Roderigo's language about Othello is characteristically racist: 'loving his own pride and purposes', 'the thick-lips', 'an old black ram', 'a lascivious Moor' (1.1.12, 66, 88, 128). When Othello appears in the next scene he performs the traditional good-character acts of preventing two armed parties falling to blows and of reverencing the old, but the serious test of his character is what the Venetian Senate makes of him and his surreptitious marriage to Desdemona. The specific charge made by Brabanzio (1.3.60–4) is witchcraft: Othello, being black, could not have got white Desdemona by conventional wooing, so he must have used spells.

Othello's defence is, essentially, Desdemona's account of the growth of their love. Othello prepares the way with a fine example of the orator's familiar self-deprecation:

[OTHELLO] Rude am I in my speech,
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace,
. . .
And therefore little shall I grace my cause

In speaking for myself.
(1.3.81–9)

That this is a merely formulaic disavowal of rhetorical power is indicated by his claim that the substance of his wooing of Desdemona was a set of extraordinarily moving accounts of himself:

OTHELLO
Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes
That I have passed.
. . . These things to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline,
. . . My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of kisses.
. . .
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.
(1.3.127–68)

As an audience we are captivated by this extensive account (running over forty lines, and compressed here) and so won over to Othello just as Desdemona was. The Duke is moved too, and exhorts Brabanzio to give over his objection to the match, but Brabanzio is determined to play the familiar role of the disapproving father who presents an obstacle to young love.

The relation of parent to child is, here as elsewhere, compared to the relationship of husband to wife, especially at the moment when a daughter breaks from a parent to form a new relationship with a husband. Shakespeare dramatised this in having Brabanzio ask his daughter to name, of all the people present in the Senate, the one she thinks she most owes her duty to. Desdemona replies:

DESDEMONA My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.

To you I am bound for life and education.
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you. You are the lord of duty,
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.
(1.3.179–88)

Part of the persuasive power of this speech, its rhetoric, is Desdemona's turning the question back upon the questioner: as Brabanzio necessarily took his wife from her father, so Othello has taken Desdemona from Brabanzio.

The cyclical pattern of marriage and parenthood visits upon the father the same treatment he visited upon his father-in-law. Likewise at the start of *King Lear* Goneril and Regan are married but Cordelia is not, so Lear has twice gone through the process of having his child taken away by another man. This fact might well condition our view of Lear's response to the impending betrothal of Cordelia, who for her part observes a contradiction in her sisters' proclamations of absolute love for their father:

CORDELIA Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me.
I return those duties back as are right fit –
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands if they say
They love you all? Haply when I shall wed
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters.
(*King Lear*, 1.1.95–103)

Cordelia begins this speech like Desdemona speaking to Brabanzio, asserting a reasonable limit to her duty, but her phrasing 'Obey you, love you, and most honour you' is surprising for these are virtually the same as the words of the Christian marriage ritual prescribed in

the Book of Common Prayer. If Cordelia intended to state the limit of her love, reserving some for her future husband, in this moment she appears to redirect that portion back to her father by imagining him as her husband. The contradiction Cordelia observes – that her sisters swear absolute love for their father and reserve none for their husbands – is 'solved' by this impossible marriage. Of course, by the same token this undermines Cordelia's insistence that (on the model of Desdemona's logic) a daughter's duty to her father is limited.

To understand the women in Shakespeare's plays it is necessary to have some sense of the social position of women in Renaissance England, for even if the play you are studying is set elsewhere it is likely that the women in it will behave much as contemporary women did in England. It is a common exaggeration to say that women had no right to own property, were entirely dominated by their husbands and fathers, and could be treated as little better than property. Natasha Korda provided a useful corrective that considered just what property rights a middle-class woman had.[24] It is true that woman had far fewer freedoms than we are used to, and that ideals of feminine behaviour have changed considerably. When Lear enters carrying the body of Cordelia in the final scene, his lament that 'Her voice was ever soft, | Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman' (5.3.247–8) is apt to raise a laugh in modern performance that almost certainly did not happen in Shakespeare's time.

In Desdemona and Cordelia, Shakespeare created two women who publicly stand up to their fathers, and what determines their different fates is the nature of the political power around them. In Shakespeare's time the republic of Venice was indeed run by a Senate with the *doge* (the duke) wielding almost no independent power. Thus, what is good for Venice matters most and Othello's marriage is declared lawful so that he may be free to be sent off to lead the state's forces. In the Britain dramatised in *King Lear*, monarchical power is absolute and Cordelia is given away to the only foreign suitor that will have her now that she has fallen into royal disfavour and brings no dowry to the match. As we saw in *Hamlet*, attending to the external forces that Shakespeare depicts as impinging upon the individual can be a fruitful way to explore the plays, for they often invite us to ask why things turn out the way

they do and, in trying to answer that question, matters that we would consider as political theory often loom large.

The case settled in their favour, Othello and Desdemona set off for Cyprus. The play is coy about whether they have had time to consummate their marriage yet; the drunken scuffling of Cassio in 2.3 that raises Othello and Desdemona at night might be yet another interruption. The island birthplace of Venus has sensual associations that would make it an appropriate location, were it not for the war. The Turkish threat, however, passes as quickly as it came and the rest of the play is concerned with domestic matters confined almost wholly within the group Othello-Desdemona-Cassio-Iago-Roderigo-Emilia. Why should we then bring an Elizabethan political context to bear on this play? One answer, provided by Jonathan Bate, is that the original audiences had decided views on the location that made the context unavoidable.[25]

The Mediterranean, Bate points out, was really two seas: the Spanish-controlled western sea and the Ottoman-controlled eastern sea, with the dividing line falling at the narrowest point along the Sicily–Tunis axis. The northern section of the western half was controlled by the Spanish superpower, the southern was lawless: navigation was a matter of hugging the shore, or island-hopping. Shakespeare was aware of the importance of islands for controlling the sea, and of the importance of the sea in international politics as well as trade. In his play *Tamburlaine* (first performed 1587–8) Christopher Marlowe depicted a westward sweep of conquest through Syria, Persia, and Ottoman lands, and it is Mohammed who finally strikes down Tamburlaine, not God. This was a land play that was necessarily episodic – long marches to new countries – rather than compressed. Marlowe could see the limitations this imposed and he fixed the fault in his next play by focusing on a pressure-point island.

That next play was *The Jew of Malta* (first performed *c.*1589–90) and the name of the island of Malta would in Elizabethan minds evoke the Christian Knights of Saint John. Thus a Jew of Malta would be an oxymoron, would be an 'other' having got on the inside. According to Bate, anyone going to Shakespeare's *The Moor of Venice* (the subtitle of *Othello*) would expect something of the same kind, but Shakespeare makes his Cyprus like Marlowe's Malta and

like recent history rather than, Othello and Desdemona's honeymoon notwithstanding, like the mythical Cyprus where Venus was born. Othello's name itself (especially if pronounced with a hard 't', as though it were Otello) made him sound like an Ottoman, of the kind that audience had seen rampaging in George Peele's play *The Battle of Alcazar* (first performed 1588–9). Audiences familiar with this theatrical tradition would have gone to *Othello* expecting more of the same, and would have been shocked to find a moor (meaning an adherent of Islam, not a racial term) fighting for Christians. Othello must have been converted, the mirror image of a Janizary, one of the Christian children that Turks were supposed to demand of Christian communities in their areas and who would have been brought up as Turkish soldiers.

In Bate's reading, the lucky dispersal of the Turkish fleet in Act 2 is like the Cold War near-miss of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, or like the Spanish Armada of 1588 being defeated. There were in Shakespeare's time two rough equivalents of the twentieth century's Cold War: Christian versus Muslim and Catholic versus Protestant. Protestant rulers might see themselves having more in common with Muslims than with Catholics. Reading the characters and narratives of the play as miniaturised versions of larger stories, Bate notes that Cyprus was owned by Venice because in the early fifteenth century the bad Cypriot king John (effeminately ruled by his wife) lost the independent kingdom of Cyprus and Venice took over. This is why in *Othello* uxoriousness is feared as politically threatening, as is the destruction from within by a state in mutiny. Montano is a Cypriot despite his Venetian-sounding name and his falling-out with Cassio is a replay of the loss of self-control of Cyprus. Thus Bate sees that here, as in the history plays, Shakespeare was a typical post-Armada Englishman who felt rebellion was the greatest threat to the country.

It is quite possible for a reading that so closely relates the contemporary politics to the events of the play to be correct historically and yet somewhat beside the point too, since the play has remained popular for 400 years with audiences who know nothing of these events. Does this mean that it is no longer for us political and topical and should be addressed only in domestic terms? Even without the overtly political context, there are things that we might think strictly

domestic (such as name-calling) that in Shakespeare's time carried much greater significance than they do for us. As Lisa Jardine argues, Othello's calling Desdemona a whore might strike us as nothing more serious than a married couple's war of words, but 400 years ago this was the most serious defamation that a woman could suffer and if the accusation stuck it would have significant effects on her future rights.[26]

THE CHARACTER OF OTHELLO IN THE WORLD

Jardine argues that the play's realm of the domestic is wider than we allow, because the period's sense of the public significance of what happens in a marriage is wider than we allow. But Jardine herself closes down part of the play's public realm in asserting that Cyprus is populated solely by the military garrison, so that there is (unnaturally) no wider realm of the public, and hence of public opinion, to which the barbarous behaviour of cruel Othello and the innocence of Desdemona might be referred for justice. In fact there is a public, a citizenry, on Cyprus.

The island cannot be entirely peopled by soldiers, else the public proclamation of celebration (2.2) makes no sense. Military leaders address their men by orders, so this proclamation is clearly addressed to the civilian population of Cyprus. As we saw in relation to *Hamlet*, certain kinds of readers (such as Laurence Olivier) treat the world of the play as inhabited only by those directly involved in the dramatic action, and this tends to make the whole thing more domestic and familial than it needs to be. Other readers (such as Grigori Kosintsev) will come to the work with the assumption that whatever else is going on, the world is inhabited by many incidental persons whose lives intersect with the main action but who are not directly involved in it. The latter kind of reader assumes a social dimension to life that the former is apt to ignore. In *Othello* Shakespeare was clearly thinking of a civilian population as at least the backdrop to the action, for he has Othello address them in this proclamation.

The matter of sociability, then, is crucial to the world that we construct for the fictional characters of a play to inhabit. For certain

critics, the social is not merely the world *in* which the action happens, but rather it is the very stuff that happens. In an essay on what he called the 'politics of plausibility', Alan Sinfield has argued that essentially what goes wrong in *Othello* is that the main characters have no-one to check their versions of reality with: although there are people in Cyprus outside the central circle, they are not consulted, whence the disaster.[27] For Sinfield, the play's concern with rhetoric, with persuasiveness, goes far beyond the example of Othello talking his way out of a jam in the Venetian Senate. Iago tells Cassio that he is in control of whether his reputation is lost, but this is nonsense since language, and reputation, are social not personal. Everybody in the play is telling stories and fighting with others to have their stories believed: Iago and Roderigo tell Brabanzio a story that he tells the senate, Othello counters with his own version about how he wooed by storytelling.

Iago manages in his story to get Othello to accept that it is against nature for a white woman to love him; that is, Othello internalises the racism he has been trying to adjust to. Iago succeeds not because he is very good at storytelling, but precisely the opposite: he speaks common sense and hence is believed. The problem is that Venetian culture sets what Sinfield calls 'the conditions of plausibility' that make Iago's stories believable. This is a typically Marxist-influenced sense of how the individual relates to the wider society. As with a spoken sentence, which feels utterly within the speaker's control but which of course is made of inherited words (and thus words she did not make for herself), individual agency is confined within the limits of an external system (language, society). It *feels* as though I am free to say anything, although I can in truth only speak, or here type, existing English words.

Right to the end of the play, the telling of stories and the competition of stories are all. In Othello's final story of killing a Turk, he 'becomes a good subject once more' by agreeing to the Venetian state's ideas about who is civilised and who is barbaric, and he agrees that he is a mixture of both.[28] There is not a disjunction between individual identity and society, rather both are generated in the same processes: we come to know who we are through others and they through us. Desdemona comes closest to understanding what is going on in her conversations with Emilia, and Othello gets it wrong

because he has no-one to check his ideas out with. For Sinfield, what I characterised as a kind of rebellion in Desdemona in resisting her father was but part of a larger ideological problem: marriage is supposed to ensure the passing of a woman from one male's control to another's, with the consent of both males, but this can create divided loyalties if the men do not agree. As Desdemona says, she obeys her husband first. Sinfield points out that the Reformation made this worse by promoting the personal, companionship, side of marriage over the social side without giving up the basic patriarchal authority.

Marriage provided one opportunity for a woman to deny parental authority, and in the case of Desdemona the disruption this causes affects the highest governmental body in the state as it has to hear Brabanzio's complaint. In comedies the parents come to accept the children's marital wishes, in tragedies the failure to gain parental consent leads to disaster. The conflict between the arranged marriage model and love matches remained a staple of literature until this century, and in most cultures (Sinfield excepts immigrant Asian families in Britain) the freely-chosen love match has won out. As we shall see in the next chapter, there are considerable objections to Sinfield's simplification of a complex terrain even if we stick to literature of the seventeenth century. In *All's Well that Ends Well* Shakespeare seems to want us to identify with and feel sympathy for a woman who forced marriage upon a man who does not love her, and to feel disgust at his subsequent flight from this unhappy arranged marriage. Not without cause this is often considered to be a problematic play.

RACIAL DIFFERENCE – CULTURAL DIFFERENCE – MULTICULTURALISM

To end this chapter, it will be useful to reconsider the relationship of the individual to the social in the context of race and ideas about tragedy. Notwithstanding contemporary criticism's disdain for character criticism and character-centred theatre production, there are intelligent actors and directors who hold character to be the central concern of drama and yet do not fall for traditional criticism's privileging of the individual. The Ghanaian actor Hugh Quarshie

argued in 1999 that black actors should not play Othello, or at least not without major reworking of the play, because the role is essentially a white racist caricature of the supposedly typical personality of an African man. Moreover, of all Shakespeare's heroes, he is the weakest:

> It is his credulity which diminishes Othello as a tragic hero and therefore diminishes the tragic effect. Of all the tragic flaws in Shakespeare's characters – pride, procrastination, ambition, among others – credulity is the least likely to engage sympathetic understanding. It is Othello's credulity which alienates him from our sympathy, as his colour alienates him from Venetian society. And Shakespeare seems to suggest that his colour and his race explain his credulity, his jealousy and his violence.[29]

In referring to a tragic flaw, Quarshie invokes Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* (from the Greek for the verb 'to err'), meaning the literally fatal shortcoming in a hero who is in every other respect above all others in personal attributes. Aristotle's idea was that such a figure is essentially good and admirable, but this one weakness, brought to the surface and made to matter in some way, produces disproportionate misery. Clearly, we are here in the same interpretative realm as Hamlet in his reference to the 'vicious mole of nature' that destroys all the goodness that a person otherwise displays.

Although Bradley disclaims Shakespeare's adherence to any codified poetical theory, such as Aristotle's,[30] the terms in which he discusses tragedy are much the same as Aristotle's:

> In the circumstances where we see the hero placed, his tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him. To meet these circumstances something is required which a smaller man might have given, but which the hero cannot give. He errs, by action or omission; and his error, joining with other causes, brings on him ruin.[31]

This, then, is the individualist model of tragedy: the fault is in the person.

Quarshie accepted that in Bradley's understanding of Shakespeare, Othello is not simply 'a black savage who has acquired a veneer of sophistication, which simply has to be scratched off by Iago for the savagery to be revealed'.[32] But then Bradley spoiled his contrast between the stereotypical childlike African and the altogether more complex character that Shakespeare created by apparently accepting that for most Africans the stereotype is broadly correct, that 'wogs [do] begin at Calais',[33] which prejudice is shown by Bradley's writing:

> If the reader has ever chanced to see an African violently excited, he may have been startled to observe how completely at a loss he was to interpret those bodily expressions of passion which in a fellow-countryman he understands at once, and in a European foreigner with somewhat less certainty. The effect of difference in blood in increasing Othello's bewilderment regarding his wife is not sufficiently realised. The same effect has to be remembered in regard to Desdemona's mistakes in dealing with Othello in his anger.[34]

For Quarshie this confirms Bradley's bigotry: '. . . for this authoritative commentator, Othello behaves as he does because he is black'.[35]

Quarshie's conclusion is unfair. Bradley undeniably is Anglocentric in assuming that his reader is British, but he also assumes that the reader is male and elsewhere assumes that the reader is heterosexual and these are typical foibles of his age. But the thrust of his argument at this point is that what we would call cultural difference is apt to cause mutual misunderstanding. Describing Iago's power to deceive Othello, Bradley is here not concerned with inherent flaws but the difficulties of being an outsider in a racist society: '. . . there comes now [from Iago] . . . the suggestions that he is not an Italian, not even a European; that he is totally ignorant of the thoughts and customary morality of Venetian women . . .'.[36] Bradley's point is that Othello cannot rely on having known Desdemona long, and cannot rely on his ability to read her motivations by her demeanour since, as Othello has been made aware, he is a foreigner. Whereas there is 'instinctive interpretation

of character . . . between persons of the same race', between races there is possibility of misreading and hence, Iago is able to convince him, Othello should not rely on his own reading of Desdemona's innocence.

If we substitute 'culture' for 'race' in Bradley's assertions, nothing he says differs from what one might hear in a Diversity Awareness training session in any modern corporation or public institution: in different cultures the norms of gesture, personal space, emotional demonstrativeness, and linguistic codings of politeness or aggression are all different. Othello's awareness of his own status as 'other' within Venetian society, Bradley argued, is precisely what Iago exploits, and to make this point Bradley asked the reader to imagine or recall being baffled by the behaviour of something from another culture. Bradley explicitly described this as mutual misunderstanding – he was mocking the racially 'other' – by insisting on not only 'Othello's bewilderment regarding his wife' but equally 'Desdemona's mistakes in dealing with Othello'.

An important question in criticism is whether it is right to assert that the effects of cultural differences between people are more important than the common humanity that binds them together. But Bradley is no more guilty here than the poststructuralist critics who assert that, because language structures consciousness, people thinking in different languages have thoughts that cannot be directly mapped from one to another.[37] There are good reasons to suppose that underlying the seeming differences between languages are common structures and that likewise we have non-verbal systems of communication (especially facial expressions) that are effectively transcultural and ahistorical.[38]

Appeals to a common human nature are widely feared within the intellectual circles of societies such as Great Britain that bear collective shame for past colonial exploitation, because historically the assertion of human sameness was usually a cover for extolling the imposed British culture and denigrating (often, criminalising) the local native culture. By contrast, in countries such as South Africa where dominant colonisers imposed strict separateness under the mask of respecting cultural diversity, to assert that we are all alike was and is to align oneself with politically progressive, enlightened thinking.

With this is mind, we can spot the real problem with Bradley's mode of character criticism. If, as Bradley would have us, we ascribe Othello's willingness to believe that he may have misunderstood the character of his new wife to his precarious status as favoured 'other' within Venetian society, rather than to racially determined credulity, whither his fatal flaw? Because they consider the tragedies in terms of integration, assimilation, and cultural difference, Bradley's and Sinfield's approaches are remarkably similar. Both treat tragedy as essentially a mode of drama that diagnoses flaws not in the individual but in the wider society of which they are, perhaps precariously, a part.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Macrocosm–microcosm analogies of the kind described by E. M. W. Tillyard are to be found across the drama.
- Characters' mental health is recurrently indicated by their responses to narrative fictions with which they are presented within the actions of the plays.
- The core concerns with sex and suicide can be made sense of using modern psychological analyses, but equally make sense when understood within Elizabethan models of how the individual relates to, and is affected by, wider society.
- Theatre and film practitioners and critics may show or omit the wider world of persons not directly concerned with the events of the tragedy. To show and attend to this wider social world tends to reduce the sense of personal *hamartia* and to enhance the sense that the world itself is sick.
- It is easy to adopt unthinkingly the protagonist's view of the stories told within a play, but it is better to resist this temptation and try to make sense of the conditions that make certain stories plausible and others implausible.
- Although unfashionable, character criticism – the kind that treats the work not merely as a verbal artefact but also as a tale about personalities – can lead to insights similar to those of the more obvious dissident readings of explicitly political critics.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 4

Problem Plays and Romances: *All's Well that Ends Well* and *The Winter's Tale*

As with the beginning of *King Lear*, *All's Well that Ends Well* starts with an onstage discussion of a character who is present but silent, and in both plays we are probably right to feel uncomfortable for this person. Whereas Gloucester's bragging about the illicit sex that gave life to Edmund is over in a couple of dozen lines, Helen and her dead father are discussed for almost twice as long, until she starts crying. Written 1604–5, *All's Well that Ends Well* preceded *King Lear* by about a year, and in fact if anything the opening scene probably would have reminded audiences of the first scene of *Hamlet*: a disconsolate young mourner, stuck in grieving for a lost father while everyone else tries to get on with future plans, which in this case means young Bertram leaving (Laertes-like) for Paris.

Instead of Polonius's tedious saws – 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' (*Hamlet* 1.3.75) and so on – Bertram gets off lightly with his mother's more succinct version:

> [COUNTESS] Love all, trust a few,
> Do wrong to none. Be able for thine enemy
> Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend
> Under thy own life's key. Be checked for silence
> But never taxed for speech.
> (1.1.61–5)

In many respects, this feels like a gender-reversed rerun of *Hamlet* and to that extent, the play covers familiar ground. However, there are disturbing elements to the play that make its events uncomfortable and its themes unfamiliar.

In the late nineteenth century, F. S. Boas found parallels between the drama of his own time (especially the plays of Henrik Ibsen) and Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, and in *Shakspere and His Predecessors* (1896) Boas argued that these were 'problem plays' that formed a distinct genre of their own. Like the nineteenth-century European drama, these plays were, Boas thought, surprisingly frank about social attitudes towards sex and they explored the miseries that followed from hypocritical behaviour, especially by young men.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Shakespeare's comedies are typically casual and indulgent about sexual desire, but these plays take a darker view and explore subjects such as unplanned pregnancy, coerced sex, and prostitution. As such they form a distinct break from Shakespeare's earlier writing, and although such things occur in his other plays it is only in these 'problem plays' that they are intensely inspected and their most uncomfortable realities presented to audiences. In the analysis offered here, one of these plays, *All's Well that Ends Well*, will be examined in relation to the kind of play Shakespeare wrote in the last years of his career, the so-called Romances. As we shall see, the Romances also handle uncomfortable sexual themes, but Shakespeare found ways to nonetheless bring the stories to satisfying, even celebratory, climaxes.

NOT HAMLET IN A DRESS, NOR HELEN IN BREECHES

In certain aspects, then, the opening of *All's Well that Ends Well* feels like a rerun of *Hamlet*. As least it does until Helen is left alone on the stage to tell the audience what is on her mind. It is quite a shock:

> LAFEU Farewell, pretty lady. You must hold the credit of your father. *Exeunt Bertram and Lafeu*
> HELEN
> O were that all! I think not on my father,

And these great tears grace his remembrance more
Than those I shed for him. What was he like?
I have forgot him. My imagination
Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.
I am undone. There is no living, none,
If Bertram be away. 'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me.
(1.1.76–86)

This will be not a tragedy of unavoidable remembering as in *Hamlet*, then, but a comedy of forgetting, and if the first audience were familiar with the boy actor playing Helen and knew his status within the company – that is, if they could tell that the play would largely be about his character – then they might well predict that Helen's getting or failing to get the love of Bertram was to be the substance of the afternoon's drama. The initial problem to be solved is that Bertram is leaving for Paris with Lafeu, and Helen has no obvious reason to follow.

Left alone again at the end of the next scene Helen reflects on her situation and on what might be called her 'fate':

HELEN
Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see and cannot feed mine eye?
(1.1.212–17)

Like a few of Shakespeare's characters, Helen looks for fictional parallels for her own case in order to decide what to do: 'Who ever strove | To show her merit that did miss her love?' (1.1.222–3). Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale* Camillo, asked by his master Leontes the king of Sicilia to kill king Polixenes of Bohemia, says to himself:

[CAMILLO] To do this deed,
Promotion follows. If I could find example
Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
And flourished after, I'd not do 't. But since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment bears not one,
Let villainy itself forswear 't.
(*The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.357–62)

Notice that the lesson from fiction and/or from history (it is not clear which he means) reinforces his predisposition to refuse, just as Helen says of cosmological influence: 'The fated sky | Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull | Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull'.

That is to say, the stars reinforce any reluctance we might have. Otherwise, according to Helen, we and not the stars are masters of our destinies. Characters that Shakespeare apparently wants us to take sympathetically seem to hold roughly Helen's line: there is stellar influence, but it does not entirely constrain human behaviour. Moreover, the passages above suggest that perhaps we 'read' the stars as we read literary and historical exempla: to confirm the actions that we already are disposed to follow. For contrast, we might consider Romeo's exclamation 'I defy you, stars' in *Romeo and Juliet* (5.1.24).

Yet Helen too, like Romeo, sees an injustice: 'What power is it which mounts my love so high, | That makes me see and cannot feed mine eye?' That is, she measures reality by her own feelings and reasons that since something has made her love Bertram inordinately she is entitled, by that something's power, to do what she can to get Bertram. Helen has a plan, but contrary to the first audience's expectations if they were familiar with the behaviour of Shakespeare's frustrated female heroines – Julia, Portia, Rosalind, Viola – she will not overcome adversity by usurping male power in cross-dressing. Even speaking alone on the stage, Helen cannot utter her love and breaks off: 'The King's disease –'. Problematically (and that adjective will recur in this chapter) her motivation for helping heal the king will not be selfless. As we shall see, Camillo's motivation for betraying the young lovers Florizel and Perdita to the king near the end of *The Winter's Tale* is similarly selfish.

The Countess is made aware of Helen's love for Bertram and confronts her about it. This puts Helen in the awkward position of needing, she thinks, to clear herself of the suspicion of presumption in wanting to marry into the aristocracy, and so in Act 1 she has to play down her intention to help the sick king (1.3.214–33). Having reassured the Countess about her motivations, Helen's attentions cure the king of France and a ballad of this miraculous recovery is immediately written and published (2.3.22–4), so that Helen who, like Camillo, sought a narrative source to shape her actions is herself a narrative source for others. However, the recovery of the king was only ever a means to her end of following and winning Bertram, so there is a curious slippage in her achieving fame for something that is to her essentially beside the point. It is a slippage characteristic of this kind of awkward drama, for at the height of her success she has not yet the thing she came for. The link between these elements of the story is the fairy-tale device of her medical help being rewarded with the right to choose any of the lords of the court for her husband.

Audiences primed by plays that followed the Greek New Comedy trajectory of pitting young lovers against obstructive fathers who have their own marriage plans for their children – plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* (both first performed 1595) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (first performed 1597–8) among many others by Shakespeare's fellow dramatists – would probably find this fairy-tale imposition of royal prerogative strange and awkward, and much would depend (and much does depend now in performance) on how the actors playing the young men respond to Helen.

CHOOSING AMONG THE MEN

The script is notoriously ambivalent about the young men's reactions when Helen is apparently choosing from among them (2.3.77–96), for although they speak words that are outwardly gracious and willing, there is always the potential for an acting manner (such as the avoiding of eye contact) and enunciation (such as speaking through stiffened lips) that undermines the outward meaning. Lafeu's interspersed asides seem at odds with the young

lords' words: 'Do all they deny her?', 'These boys are boys of ice'. Unless Lafeu is entirely misreading the action, the lords would seem to be aloof. Helen herself refers to their disdainful looks, but this might be part of the elaborate ritual of the occasion. It certainly is a charade, for Helen already knows which of the lords she wants.

What distinguishes this from a conventional scene in which a maid or princess of the court has a set of suitors to choose from, as for example in the court of good king Simonides in Shakespeare and Wilkins's *Pericles*, is that rather than competing for her favour, Helen has the power of choice, devolving to her from the king. The lords' acquiescence (reluctant or willing, as the actors prefer) is an acceptance of royal power, and of its indirect transmission through the king's chosen medium; it is not the acceptance of direct female power. As we saw in Chapter 3 (pp. 106–13 above), the love-match marriage was a means by which women could defer patriarchal authority, could subvert the transmission of property rights as a woman is passed from father to the 'son' he chooses. Here Helen is making a free choice, but bizarrely it is one that reinforces the patriarchal power of the monarch, since the king is, in the official ideological doctrine of the time, the 'father' of his subjects.

The actors' choice of whether or not the other young lords rankle at being subject to Helen's will matters crucially when it becomes apparent that Bertram rankles:

> HELEN (*to Bertram*)
> I dare not say I take you, but I give
> Me and my service ever whilst I live
> Into your guiding power. – This is the man.
> KING
> Why then, young Bertram, take her, she's thy wife.
> BERTRAM
> My wife, my liege? I shall beseech your highness,
> In such a business give me leave to use
> The help of mine own eyes.
> (2.3.103–9)

Actors who choose to have Lafeu be mistaken in his reading of the young lords' responses – who choose to have the lords act as they

sound, gracious and willing – would here, by that choice, isolate Bertram as the only one who cannot see what great good fortune has befallen him to receive the gift of an attractive wife and at the same time make the king happy in doing so. If, on the other hand, the lords are all reluctant, Bertram is merely putting into words what any of them might say if taken up on their apparently acquiescent language.

More complexly still, there is textual warrant for perhaps a couple of the lords being eager (and sincere in their acceptance of her) and a couple to be reluctant (and hence insincere), in order that Bertram, in emulating them, has to choose a side to be on. This choice would mirror his choice of side in the entirely arbitrary Florentine–Sienese war, in the prosecution of which the French king allows his young courtiers to fight on either side. This would raise the interesting possibility of showing Bertram as immaturely rash, eager to follow others' behaviour in matters of greater import than he understands, and here being confronted with the problem that his role models (upon whom a fatherless adolescent boy so much depends) are not of one mind.

So far, from a New Comedic angle, Bertram's objection to having no choice in his marriage ought to be approved of by the audience whether or not the other lords seem to feel the same way. Notwithstanding any affection that might have grown for Helen in the brief time she has been on stage, young people (the tradition has it) should not be forced to marry those they do not choose. Never mind that Shakespeare has reversed the usual conditions of the situation, in which traditionally a daughter's father treats her as his object and attempts to give her to the man of his choosing. We might well assume that a simple gender inversion – a 'father' king tries to give his 'son' courtier (for so he called him at 1.2.76) to a woman of his choosing – ought to make no difference to an audience's responses here.

Bertram spoils his case, though, with snobbery: 'She had her breeding at my father's charge. | A poor physician's daughter, my wife? Disdain | Rather corrupt me ever' (2.3.115–17). Before this rebellion, Bertram spoke just 192 of the preceding 10,000 or so words of the play, or about 2 per cent of the dialogue. Most of those words were spoken in one-line answers to others' questions, so as far as the audience are concerned he is a blank whose only discernible desire is to be allowed to join the other lords who are setting

off to fight on one or the other side (they seem to care not which) of the war between Siena and Florence. Now he reveals himself as a snob, and the king chides him for it, promising to make up the formal lack with honours he can bestow, and launching into a disquisition on the nature of honour:

> [KING] . . . honours thrive
> When rather from our acts we them derive
> Than our foregoers. The mere word's a slave,
> Debauched on every tomb, on every grave
> A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb
> Where dust and dammed oblivion is the tomb
> Of honoured bones indeed. What should be said?
> If thou canst like this creature as a maid,
> I can create the rest. Virtue and she
> Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.
> (2.3.136–45)

This argues in the same way, and covers the same ground as, the Old Wife's argument about gentility in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer (*c.*1387–1400): not from our ancestors but from our deeds do we acquire honour (or call it virtue, or gentility, or nobility). This is a singularly inappropriate argument to present to Bertram, for as we have seen the one thing known is that he longs to get away to war to show, by his deeds, that he has those qualities that a man of his station ought to have. Whereas Chaucer's young rapist knight has deeds he wishes to make up for, and clear his debt, Bertram feels about himself much as the audience feels about him: he is yet a blank. Unsurprisingly, the king's rhetoric has no effect on Bertram and to defend his honour (as he puts it, 2.3.150), the king imposes a marriage that Bertram outwardly conforms to while inwardly planning to escape.

HELEN'S QUEST

Shakespeare may have been rereading Chaucer at this point in his career, for there is a distinct reworking of Chaucerian themes in his

late plays – one of them, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613–14), co-written with John Fletcher, is overtly based on *The Knight's Tale* – and the fairy-tale elements in *All's Well that Ends Well* are entirely in keeping with such an influence. One of the distinctive fairy-tale features is the making of a kind of prophecy, a set of conditions that must be met before the action can be closed off at the end of the story. In *Macbeth* (first performed 1606) the prophecy is made by witches, in *The Winter's Tale* (first performed 1609) the prophecy is made by the priests at the oracle of Delphos, and in *Cymbeline* (first performed 1610) the prophecy is delivered by Jupiter riding on an eagle. In earlier plays, prophecies were most often the work of human beings hunting for signs of the future buried in the every-day world, as with the Welshman's intepretations of withered bay trees in *Richard 2*, 2.4 (first performed 1595), or the competing interpretations of Calpurnia's dream in *Julius Caesar*, 2.2 (first performed 1599). An exception to this rule that early-play prophecies are (imperfect) human work and later-play prophecies are (reliable) supernatural work is the prophecy wrung from the devil Asnath in the collaborative play *The Contention of York and Lancaster* (= *2 Henry 6*, first performed 1591).

Leaving aside Asnath then – and he is most unusual being the only spirit conjured in Shakespeare – we could choose to read Bertram's 'prophecy' as a bridge between the early kind in which human beings try to make sense of the world around them and the later kind in which supernatural characters set conditions that must be met. There is an element of each of these aspects in the strange letter Bertram leaves for his new wife when he departs for the Italian wars:

> HELEN
> Look on his letter, madam: here's my passport. [*She*] *reads aloud*
> 'When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a "then" I write a "never".'
> This is a dreadful sentence.
> (3.2.56–61)

This letter sets the conditions that Helen has to fulfil, and of course Bertram believes their fulfilment to be impossible. His conviction is rather like Macbeth's regarding the impossibility of Birnam Wood moving and of an adversary being not of woman born, with of course the difference that Bertram himself has set them. For the audience these words define the state of affairs the play has to bring about (and that is true of all such prophecies in the plays) but for Helen they constitute a challenge, a kind of mission akin to the Labours of Hercules in classical Greek mythology or the quests of knights in the chivalric romances of the late Middle Ages.

The next two acts of the play show Helen pursuing her quest and fulfilling the conditions of Bertram's letter, including the infamous bed-trick that so strains audience credulity. Or at least, she comes close to fulfilling Bertram's conditions. In the final scene she is able to show that she has the ring and that she is pregnant by Bertram, although it is stretching a point to claim that showing a swollen belly is the same as showing the child inside it. Indeed, repeating the terms when claiming to have fulfilled them, Helen has to reword the conditions to make her actions fit their requirements:

> [HELEN] There is your ring.
> And, look you, here's your letter. This it says:
> 'When from my finger you can get this ring,
> And are by me with child,' et cetera. This is done.
> (5.3.312–16)

David Thatcher argues that while writing the play Shakespeare realised that there was not enough plot time available to squeeze in the full nine months of gestation, so he here rewrote the conditions slightly and failed to go back and fix the original reading in 3.2.[1] This seems odd logic to use in respect of a play that has the characters dashing across Europe and contains the entirety of a small war: if anything, towards the end of his career Shakespeare was likely to stretch or compress time and space to suit the needs of the story he wished to tell, rather than adjust the story to conform to arbitrary notions of the realistic. This play in particular is scarcely realistic.

The alternatives that Thatcher rejected are considerably more interesting than the prosaic solution he settles for. One is that Helen

is paraphrasing and speaking in general terms about her actions rather than in strict terms about the prophecy. Helen's 'et cetera' gives editors much trouble: does she say it, or does it imply that the actor can go on a bit in the same vein? We could use this 'et cetera' to support a claim that she means only to paraphrase the letter's contents. An even more interesting proposition is that Helen has not quite achieved what was demanded and she knows it, so she has to elide the difference between what she has done and what was called for. Thatcher has an objection to this:

> It is certainly very odd that Helena produces the documentary evidence of the letter when it would, if examined, demonstrate that at least one of her 'readings' was wrong. By producing the letter (something she does not need to do if she is deliberately altering its terms) she is taking the risk that Bertram (or the Countess, who is present at both 'readings') might use it to verify her reading of it.[2]

Perhaps the discrepancy is intentional on Helen's part and serves to give Bertram an escape route that he can take if he is still as immature as he was at the start of the play. That is, like Chaucer's young rapist knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Shakespeare's Bertram has a choice between maintaining an immature petulance and accepting his wife's judgement, and he passes this final test by choosing the latter.

UNSUITABLE HUSBANDS

This interpretation has the merit of engaging with perhaps the play's main 'problem', which is that Bertram seems an unsuitable husband. If Bertram has not changed by the end of the play, an audience that is sympathetic to Helen – as they surely must be once class enters the questions – is presented with the dilemma that her choice of love object seems so poor. Could she not do better than Bertram? There appears to be a strain of unsuitable husbands in the late plays. In Shakespeare and Wilkins's *Pericles*, Marina marries Lysimachus, the governor of Mytilene, whom she first met when he

came to the brothel in which she was enslaved, looking for a virgin to deflower. In *Cymbeline*, Innogen marries a man who brags of her fidelity, takes a wager on it, and when he thinks he has lost the wager orders her murder; the young couple are reconciled at the end, but it is hard not to forget how unworthy is Posthumus of Innogen.

The most unworthy husband in the late plays is King Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* who, like Posthumus and Othello, mistakenly believes his wife unfaithful, tries her for treason (which it is when the king is the cuckold), and condemns their baby to be exposed to die in a foreign country. Perhaps Bertram is reformed and shows it by not disputing the legal detail of Helen's fulfilment of his conditions, in the same way that Leontes accepts as Hermione the statue that comes to life, without demur on the impossibility. Some critics would argue here that it is meaningless to refer to the statue of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* since there is no statue: Hermione did not die, and the supposed statue is Hermione herself, standing still.

Perhaps our being so literal about the matter is itself the kind of quibbling that these plays abjure – 'It is required | You do awake your faith' (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.95) – since the play seems to suggest that the matter is not quite cleared up to everyone's satisfaction at the end. Because Shakespeare pulls off one of his rare tricks of deceiving his audience, in that Hermione did not die when we thought she did, it requires a certain amount of mental backtracking to revaluate the foregoing action in the light of the ending. It is not unusual to hear audiences leaving the theatre after a performance of *The Winter's Tale* discussing the coming to life of the statue, and it is not clear that they have applied the wrong artistic criteria in abjuring an entirely rational approach to the action.

I have suggested that *All's Well that Ends Well* can be seen as a transitionary play, showing Shakespeare on his way to the late plays, or Romances, as they are sometimes called, that are characterised by improbable events, long and difficult journeys by land and sea, and the sundering and reuniting of families. David W. Kay rejected this kind of thinking and argued that *All's Well that Ends Well* 'belongs to a clearly defined dramatic subgenre of prodigal-husband plays in the repertory of the Lord Chamberlain's–King's Men and their competitors at this time'.[3] That is to say, rather

than looking to what else Shakespeare wrote – as this book on Shakespeare naturally does – we can best understand what he wrote by comparing it with what his contemporaries, his fellow dramatists, wrote. Put in the context of his working life, things that seem anomalous become regular.

In one sense Kay is of course right, and one could reorder the canon of English literature so that it were less author-centred and so that, say, the plays of the open-air amphitheatres of the 1590s were read as a group regardless of the writers' individual oeuvres. This should not strike us as terribly strange: the canon of twentieth-century cinema is structured around cultural milieux (say, French films of the 1950s), around directors, and to a lesser degree around actors, and the writers are in almost all cases hardly credited as centres of cinematic authority. Indeed, in Shakespeare studies there are powerful voices calling for such a reordering of the objects of interest, but we should remember that it is considerably easier to imagine a new ordering after rather than before or while one is making sense of the current ordering. This book is aimed primarily at those who consider themselves to be reading Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* rather than reading one of a string of prodigal-husband plays. With that imperfect justification for sticking with authorial centrality, we may proceed to the end of the play.

A final problem, encountered in the closing moments of a performance, is whether we believe that all really is well with the relationship of Bertram and Helen:

KING (*to Helen*)
Let us from point to point this story know
To make the even truth in pleasure flow.
(*To Diana*) If thou be'st yet a fresh uncropped flower,
Choose thou thy husband and I'll pay thy dower.
For I can guess that by thy honest aid
Thou kept'st a wife herself, thyself a maid.
Of that and all the progress more and less
Resolvedly more leisure shall express.
All yet seems well; and if it end so meet,
The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.
Flourish of trumpets

> The King's a beggar now the play is done.
> All is well ended if this suit be won:
> That you express content, which we will pay
> With strife to please you, day exceeding day.
> Ours be your patience then, and yours our parts:
> Your gentle hands lend us, and take our hearts. *Exeunt*
> (5.3.326–Epilogue 6)

Leaving aside the problem that the king seems about to start the whole story off again by forcing a fresh young lord to marry Diana, we should notice that the closing lines are spoken by the king while the other actors are still on the stage, which is most unusual for epilogues. It certainly is an epilogue: the references to the completion of the performance and the transformation of the king back into a player make this unquestionably a direct address to the audience, set apart from what precedes it.

Robert Weimann argues that closure is prepared for ten lines before the start of the epilogue by the King's speaking of the story as completed: 'Let us from point to point this story know | To make the even truth in pleasure flow' (5.3.326–7). This argument makes the epilogue part of what precedes it by blurring the distinction between the two, suggesting an incremental deflation of the dramatic fiction, punctuated by moments in which the king is still the king. For example 'I'll pay thy dower' comes after the call for a retelling.[4]

Barbara Everett has argued for another link between the epilogue and the dialogue that leads up to it. Everett sees a chain of conditional terms beginning with Bertram's 'If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly | I'll love her dearly, ever ever dearly' (5.3.317–18) which continues with Helena's 'If it appear not plain and prove untrue' (5.3.319). The king then follows with three more conditional clauses: '(*To Diana*) If thou be'st yet a fresh uncropped flower' (5.3.328), then with regard to the completed story: 'if it end so meet' (5.3.334), and then finally in the epilogue: 'All is well ended if this suit be won: | That you express content' (Ep. 2–3). Everett comments:

> Bertram's 'If' starts a chain of conditions, that lead us out of the play; so that *All's Well That Ends Well* is (as its title half

> ironically promises) an open-ended work indeed. With a pregnant heroine on stage at the end of it, the gesture to futurity is in place.[5]

This reading makes the end unsettling indeed; in fact the story has not ended because all these conditionals remain suspended over the ending, as though Shakespeare wanted his audience to leave the theatre in an interrogative mood: has it ended well, is all well?

DO HERMIONE AND POLIXENES PADDLE PALMS?

The Winter's Tale starts as *All's Well that Ends Well* ends, with a visibly pregnant married woman on the stage with her husband. Both plays are concerned with sex, infidelity in marriage, the inability of men to recognise their own, and especially with the physical condition of pregnancy. For those reasons, it might not be going too far to wonder if the titles were meant, as we saw *Much Ado about Nothing* was (pp. 36–9 above), to lend themselves to vulgar puns: a winter's 'stale' (in the sense of prostitute) and all is well that 'ends', meaning genitals, make swell. If this seems to be imposing more overt sexuality than the plays will properly bear, it is worth recalling that just how bawdy the plays are is largely a matter determined in performance; textually they are mere potential.

Early in *The Winter's Tale* there is a moment, like that of the young lords' responses to Helen in *All's Well that Ends Well*, which demands that the actors make a crucial decision upon which the audience's responses to the action will hinge. In the formal action of the second scene, King Leontes seeks to persuade King Polixenes to prolong his stay in Sicilia, but fails. Leontes asks his queen Hermione try her persuasion, and she succeeds:

> HERMIONE
> He'll stay, my lord.
> LEONTES At my request he would not.
> Hermione, my dearest, thou never spok'st
> To better purpose.

HERMIONE Never?
LEONTES Never but once.
HERMIONE
What, have I twice said well? When was 't before?
. . .
LEONTES Why, that was when
Three crabbèd months had soured themselves to death
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clap thyself my love. Then didst thou utter,
'I am yours for ever.'
(1.2.89–107)

This is not the crucial moment to which I am referring, but is worth pausing on for a moment. In performance Leontes' teasing puzzle can seem charming – it can elicit applause from the other courtiers present in this potentially public exchange – but his choice of words is distinctly unpleasant. Leontes characterises his wooing of Hermione as a painful experience during which her reluctance made time crawl for him ('crabbèd months . . . soured . . . to death'), and he images his eventual success as the forcing open of a clenched fist.

Audiences sensitive to Leontes' language might spot this as a foretaste of what is coming, and there are other hints too. To say that Hermione has spoken on this occasion as she spoke when she accepted Leontes as a sexual partner (the tight fist opening is surely more than simply symbolic of marriage) is to imply that she has now accepted Polixenes as a sexual partner. Moreover, one could read some of what Polixenes says as referring to Hermione's pregnant condition:

POLIXENES
Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
Without a burden. Time as long again
Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks,
And yet we should for perpetuity
Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher,
Yet standing in rich place, I multiply

With one 'We thank you' many thousands more
That go before it.
(1.2.1–9)

To remind everyone that he has been in Sicilia nine months is effectively to say 'since the queen had sex and conceived'. To refer to the O (the round zero of nothing) that multiplies (like the round belly of sexual increase) – the thing that is no-thing on its own but huge when put 'in rich place' – is to make a metaphor of thanks, and of place, out of Hermione's physical condition. Indeed, read (or rather played) as bawdy, Polixenes' first words give Leontes plenty to worry about.

However, the actors seal the audience's response with the following business:

[*She gives her hand to Polixenes.*] *They stand aside*
LEONTES (*aside*)
Too hot, too hot:
To mingle friendship farre is mingling bloods.
I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances,
But not for joy, not joy. This entertainment
May a free face put on, derive a liberty
From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
And well become the agent. 'T may, I grant.
But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
As now they are, and making practised smiles
As in a looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
The mort o' th' deer – O, that is entertainment
My bosom likes not, nor my brows.
(1.2.110–21)

The matter for the actors is whether to perform the actions that Leontes reports, to be paddling palms and pinching fingers, or not. There is an exactly parallel moment in *Othello*:

Cassio and Desdemona talk apart
IAGO (*aside*) He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said –
whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as

> great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do. I will gyve thee in thine own courtship. You say true, 'tis so indeed. If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you are most apt to play the sir in. Very good, well kissed, an excellent curtsy, 'tis so indeed; yet again your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster-pipes for your sake.
> (*Othello*, 2.1.169–80)

In the earlier play, leaving aside the possibility that Cassio and Desdemona are illicit lovers, there ought to be a discrepancy between how they behave and how Iago describes them, for his point is that he can make such actions seem improper. That is, the actions are clean and wholesome yet he can make them foul and dirty, just as Desdemona's fingers (I assume he means hers) are clean and wholesome but he will make each like a clyster-pipe that a surgeon inserts into the rectum to perform an enema. If we think that there are other strong parallels between the plays – both show seemingly irrational male sexual jealousy – then perhaps the model of *Othello* should make actors in the analogous moment in *The Winter's Tale* follow the same discrepancy: Leontes describes over-familiarity and suspicious hand-play, but the audience sees only the usual formalities of aristocratic courtesy.

Were Polixenes and Hermione to actually perform what Leontes describes, then his jealousy is a response to what he (and the audience) sees, which might still be understood as innocent, courteous behaviour but which comes close to unwitting indiscretion. But if the actors do not perform what Leontes describes then he is effectively seeing things that are not there. Of course, a theatre audience may not be close enough to the actors to see for themselves just what happens, but nonetheless the actors have to decide which business to perform and this will condition their production's interpretation of the nature of Polixenes' jealousy. It is common for critics to assert that Polixenes' jealousy is wholly without explanation – there is no arch manipulator like Iago perverting his mind with falsehoods – but this might not be quite true.

B. J. Sokol argued that Hermione's pregnancy is the key here, and that Leontes is suffering a fairly well-known condition called Couvade Syndrome.[6] Expectant fathers can suffer physical and mental symptoms and are frequently reported to suffer paranoid delusions (in which the world is full of coded references to the sufferer and his fears) and groundless sexual jealousies. Sokol used psychoanalytical theory to make sense of this aspect of the play, and to read forward from the opening condition of Leontes, through the transformative process of being without his wife for sixteen years, to see how the final scene's apparently magical awakening of Hermione's statue is received by Leontes in a way that shows his new-found capacity to tolerate the imperfections of humanity.

THE WINTER'S TALE AS PROTO-NOVEL

Let us skip to near the end of the play to ask a question about marriage that we can read back into the preceding scenes. There is a pleasure in posing questions which a play seems conspicuously to avoid, and we may ask this one of *The Winter's Tale*: why do Florizel and Perdita not marry on the ship that carries them away from Bohemia towards Sicilia?

One of the peculiar things about being on a boat or a ship is the extraordinary power of the captain. Neither the laws of the country that it set out from, nor those of the country to which it is heading, apply on a boat. Instead the captain alone can have passengers physically restrained, put in the brig (or ship's jail), or indeed he can marry them. The captain is more powerful than anyone else on the vessel, even more powerful than the person who, on dry land, would be the captain's monarch or other social superior. This strange situation is dramatised in the first scene of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* where the king of Naples and his noblemen are verbally abused by the boatswain and the master of the ship who, in the crisis of a storm, do not even bother to be polite to their social superiors.

There are two important journeys by sea in *The Winter's Tale*, the first is Antigonus's journey to Bohemia with the baby Perdita, and the second is the return journey made by Perdita and her love Florizel about sixteen years later, back to Sicilia. In the Sicilian

court, King Leontes asks the young couple of their status: 'You are married?', to which Florizel replies 'We are not, sir, nor are we like to be' (5.1.203–4). Why did they not get married on board the ship from Bohemia to Sicilia? The captain of the ship undoubtedly had the power to do it, and it would make them much safer on arrival in the foreign court.

In the scene which follows this one we hear from Autolycus what must be the answer:

> AUTOLYCUS Now, had I not the dash of my former life in me, would preferment drop on my head. I brought the old man and his son aboard the Prince; told him I heard them talk of a fardel, and I know not what. But he at that time over-fond of the shepherd's daughter – so he then took her to be – who began to be much sea-sick, and himself little better, extremity of weather continuing, this mystery remained undiscovered. But 'tis all one to me, for had I been the finder-out of this secret it would not have relished among my other discredits.
> (5.2.112–22)

There is the solution: Florizel was too sick even to consider what the Shepherd and the Clown had to say about Perdita being a foundling, let alone to contemplate a shipboard marriage. Presumably, it was not so much the marriage ceremony itself that Florizel was too sick to perform, but rather the duty of consummating the marriage afterwards.

In these wonderings I am deliberately falling into the critical trap of treating the characters in the play as though they have independent lives of their own and might choose to do something other than what they do in the play. As we have seen, this trap was efficiently mocked in the aforementioned 1933 essay by L. C. Knights, 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?'. Knights was reacting to Victorian and early twentieth-century criticism which treated the characters as though they existed before the play began and had pre-histories into which we might enquire for illumination of their behaviour in the action on the stage; Knights wanted to replace this

character-centred criticism with an examination of the drama as essentially extended poems, verbal constructs made of symbolism and themes.

Howard Felperin reopened this debate by asking how far are we to judge what is not represented, the offstage or preceding action of a play? How far should we treat characters like our next-door neighbours, whom we do not assume cease to exist just because they go inside? Felperin took *The Winter's Tale* as a test case, and deliberately asked a question that does not usually get considered by critics: is Hermione really innocent of the adultery suspected by her husband?[7] The oracle says that she is innocent, but in the drama of Shakespeare's time pagan oracles such as that at Delphos in Greece were generally represented as giving false, or at least misleading, answers to the questions put to them. The audience would be primed to distrust the oracle. Leontes rejects the answer of the oracle, until Mamillius dies and Leontes interprets this as the gods' punishment for his error. Or does it? Mamillius is already sick in the second act (2.3.10–11), and a third reason ('mere conceit and fear | Of the queen's speed' 3.2.143–4) is offered; two natural reasons for his death must weigh at least as heavily as the supernatural punishment of Leontes by the gods.

What of the evidence in the second scene? As we have seen, Polixenes' 'Nine changes of the moon' is problematic, and Felperin wondered if Polixenes calling himself 'a cipher' standing 'in rich place' was a sniggering suggestion that he has taken Leontes' place. In following this line of enquiry Felperin was not really interested in getting at the truth of the play, rather he wanted to show that there was no truth to be got at: plays do not answer all the questions we can think to put to them. If that is so, it may be that my question about Florizel and Perdita's failure to marry is simply unanswerable. On the other hand, we could say that the better the drama is the more we are tricked into accepting the characters as though they are real people and hence the more tempted we are to ask about what they did before the play started, or what they are doing when we are not watching them.

There is a form of literature in which one is strongly encouraged to think about such things: the novel. One of the defining characteristics of the novel is that the characters, even the minor ones,

have their own lives to live and their own motivations. Realistic novels encourage us to treat the world of the book as though it were a slice of reality, and just as we know that those who, in real life, stand next to us on the bus had their own peculiar form of breakfast and are going somewhere which is of significance to them, so the characters in a novel are supposed to have their individual pasts and their potential futures. In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) Ian Watt argues that this is what distinguishes the eighteenth-century prose fictions, which he considers the proto-novels, from what went before.[8]

Characters in novels generally have realistic names, not names that merely denote their function. Thus in *The Winter's Tale* the characters Clown and Shepherd are typical of a form of writing that came before the novel and that denies personal names to minor functional characters. Characters in novels, even minor ones, also have motivations of their own that are more than just functional parts of the main story. Nobody in life is just a messenger, or a pizza deliverer, or a cloakroom attendant; these people in life have desires and goals of their own and so too in realistic novels nobody should exist merely to advance the story.

Watt argued that we start to see characters with individual motivations emerging in eighteenth-century writing. The story of *The Winter's Tale* was not, of course, Shakespeare's own invention. Like most of his stories he adapted it from an existing story, in this case the prose fiction *Pandosto* by Robert Greene, which was first published in 1588. The sending to the oracle of Delphos for a verdict is described like this in Greene's book:

> But Pandosto (whose suspitious head still remained in one song) chose out six of Nobility, whom hee knew were scarse indifferent men in the Queenes behalfe, and prouiding all things fit for their iourney, sent them to Delphos: they willing to fulfill the Kinges commaund, and desirous to see the situation and custome of the Iland.[9]

Notice how these men, who exist in the story merely to bring back the verdict of the oracle, have their own motives. They want to do a bit of sightseeing on the famous Greek island, and the commission

from King Pandosto is quite agreeable to them: they can do their duty and have a holiday at the same time.

In Shakespeare's version of the story, the two men are called Cleomenes and Dion, and they too seem to have been combining business with pleasure:

Enter Cleomenes and Dion
CLEOMENES
The climate's delicate, the air most sweet;
Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing
The common praise it bears.
DION I shall report,
For most it caught me, the celestial habits –
Methinks I so should term them – and the reverence
Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice –
How ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly
It was i' th' off'ring!
(3.1.1–8)

This depiction of the mere messengers' impressions of Delphos is a distinctly realistic gesture that Shakespeare carried over from his source. Thus the play combines a kind of proto-novelistic realism with the grossly unrealistic event of Hermione living in secret isolation for many years, and with the distinctly archetypal thinking in which Sicilia is a place of dearth and winter cold and Bohemia a place of foison and summer sun.

It is because of such seemingly antagonistic concerns – the realistic versus the archetype, the motivated versus the irrational – that *The Winter's Tale*, like the other Romances, has struck some critics as experimental writing by Shakespeare. However, we could also relate these tensions back to the macrocosmic–microcosmic correspondences discussed in Chapter 2. Perhaps at the local level human behaviour is explicable by everyday logic (Leontes has lost his mind; Camillo knows that assassins never prosper; messengers want to see the world) while at the same time it plays out a wider set of patterns that embody more fundamental story-cycles such as the changing of the seasons, human birth, maturation, and decline into old age, and the grandest of all narratives in Christian theology: the

fall and rise of humankind. Coming at the end of Shakespeare's career, it is difficult not to see this new and strange kind of drama as taking the grand views available to an experienced limner of human character and the stories it generates. Let us consider some of these grand views, which arise from the particularities of characters.

SUMMER/WINTER – MAN/WOMAN – LAND/CLASS

Cleomenes and Dion have a strong sense of the difference of place and place, and of course the two places most strongly contrasted in the play are Sicilia and Bohemia. At its crudest we might say that Sicilia is an unhappy wintry place and Bohemia a happy summery place, although of course that characterisation has to change once Polixenes divorces Florizel and Perdita near the end of the sheep-shearing scene. There are definite intimations at the beginning of the play that all is not well in Sicilia; the conversation between Camillo and Archidamus clearly displays the anxiety in the kingdom which is characteristic of a pre-existing problem in a Shakespeare play. Archidamus abruptly changes the subject after Camillo's panegyric on the warmth between Leontes and Polixenes:

> CAMILLO The heavens continue their loves.
> ARCHIDAMUS I think there is not in the world either malice
> or matter to alter it. You have an unspeakable comfort
> of your young prince, Mamillius. It is a gentleman of
> the greatest promise that ever came into my note.
> (1.1.31–6)

There is a hint of Archidamus moving away from a topic that may have an unpleasant aspect, especially in this conversation of courtly exaggeration which allows Archidamus to thank Camillo fulsomely without the gushing which would be indecorous in this context. Both men know that they are adhering to a convention of absurdly overblown language but when the conversation moves on to the topic of the mutual love of Leontes and Polixenes the firm ground

of reality that underlies their exaggeration – that the visiting Bohemians really were well treated as guests – disappears and Archidamus is distinctly uncomfortable to continue in this vein.

Archidamus moves to the more solid ground of praising the young Sicilian prince, but this topic also has an unpleasant side. Camillo's stylised exaggeration tips over into a veiled criticism of Leontes' rule:

> CAMILLO It is a gallant child; one that, indeed, physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh. They that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man.
> ARCHIDAMUS Would they else be content to die?
> CAMILLO Yes – if there were no other excuse why they should desire to live.
> ARCHIDAMUS If the King had no son they would desire to live on crutches till he had one.
> (1.1.38–46)

The effect of this opening scene is to represent a situation which is pre-loaded with anxiety; the relationship between the rulers of Bohemia and Sicily is stated as being one of unparalleled good-will, but this is articulated in a formalised display of exaggerated language which is obviously not meant to be taken literally. Indeed, the exaggerated language puts the statements about the kings' loves in doubt. Furthermore the formal praise of the young prince is pushed so far as to become a criticism of the present ruler: the old and sick are said to be hanging onto life in order to see the prince enter into manhood, which suggests that all is not well with the present king's rule and that the sooner his son takes over the better. Such a statement could be explained as simple anxiety about an aged king dying without issue, were it not for Camillo's description putting their separation in the recent past: 'there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now' (1.1.23–4); there is here too a hint of trouble in store with this 'branch now'.

At this point the audience knows nothing of what is wrong in the Sicilian state. Leaving aside Sokol's claim about Couvade

Syndrome, the audience has no immediately obvious explanation for Leontes' sudden access of jealousy. There is a repeated association in this play of the 'man' with the country he rules and 'woman' with the actual land under his domination. Camillo, among others, uses the name of the country for the name of the man who rules it, as in: 'Sicilia cannot show herself over-kind to Bohemia' (1.1.21–2). Leontes thinks of his wife's infidelity in terms of land-use rights: '[he] little thinks . . . his pond fished by his next neighbour' (1.2.195–6). Polixenes also employs the language of land-use when referring to sexual intimacy between Florizel and Perdita: 'if ever henceforth thou | These rural latches to his entrance open' (4.4.437–8).

Most vividly of all, the act of sexually infidelity is imagined by Leontes in terms of invasion by a foreign power, as in: 'a belly . . . will let in and out the enemy | With bag and baggage' (I.ii.205–7). Finally, there is the almost ceremonial laying of Perdita upon the Bohemian soil:

> [ANTIGONUS] – it should here be laid,
> Either for life or death, upon the earth
> Of its right father.
> (3.3.43–5)

There is a hint of the earth-mother topos in the custom of abandoning babies upon the mountain-side like a seed thrown onto the ground. Perdita, the product of a transgressive procreation (so Antigonus believes) is being re-conceived 'upon the earth | Of its right father', that is, upon the correct female: the soil of Bohemia. Antigonus's use of 'its' rather than 'her' may indicate that he considers the baby to be in some sense not yet human. If we accept the association of women with land in this play then sexual infidelity can be seen to be a suitable metaphor for a change in land-use rights. The rightful sexual partner being usurped in the act of cuckoldry is akin to the rightful land-user having his privileges taken by another.

It is the connection of sexual infidelity and land-use which provides the clue to what is wrong in Sicilia prior to the opening scene of the play. Leontes' fear of his wife's infidelity is a reflection of his

fears regarding social mobility. He has promoted Camillo because he is in need of him, but is racked with doubts as to the propriety of doing this. Camillo is described as 'clerk-like experienced' (1.2.392) which, although it does not exactly define his social status, makes it clear that he is not a born nobleman. Among his duties is the guardianship of the keys to all the small exits from the city (1.2.464) but his closeness to Leontes suggests that he has been providing more personal services to the monarch. When confiding his fears regarding Hermione and Polixenes, Leontes says 'I have trusted thee, Camillo, | With all the near'st things to my heart, as well | My chamber-counsels' (1.2.237–9)

Leontes suborns Camillo to kill Polixenes using the promotions given Camillo as leverage, but it is not until Camillo goes to work for Polixenes that we have a clue as to the nature of his employments:

> POLIXENES As thou lov'st me, Camillo, wipe not out the rest of thy services by leaving me now. The need I have of thee thine own goodness hath made. Better not to have had thee than thus to want thee. Thou, having made me businesses which none without thee can sufficiently manage, must either stay to execute them thyself or take away with thee the very services thou hast done.
> (4.2.11–17)

The 'businesses' that Camillo has made for Polixenes are ones that cannot be attended to by anybody else; it is not merely that no-one else could do them in his absence but that no-one else can maintain the ongoing projects he has commenced. If Camillo leaves Bohemia then these projects will fail and it will be as though he had never begun them.

There is warrant for wondering if these are 'businesses' in the modern sense of commercial ventures. Although the word 'business' is not recorded being unambiguously used in this commercial sense until 100 years after *The Winter's Tale* was first performed – by Daniel Defoe in *The English Tradesman* (1727) – this does not preclude Shakespeare using the more generic term (as it was then) to denote activities which other evidence suggests were

commercial. The other evidence is that Camillo is specifically called 'clerk-like'. He has risen from a low birth to a position of importance on the strength of his personal merits, and he performs services for the crown which no-one else is able to 'sufficiently manage'. Camillo is some kind of bourgeois agent.

Polixenes plainly suffers no disquiet about Camillo being a businessman working on behalf of the monarchy. Leontes, however, seemingly does. As much as he favours Camillo, Leontes seems fearful of him and perhaps gives him the job of assassinating Polixenes as a test of loyalty. A test of Camillo's loyalty is, of course, also a test of Leontes' own prudence in promoting Camillo. As Paul Siegel suggests, the trial of Hermione is also simultaneously a trial of Leontes: '[LEONTES] Let us be cleared | Of being tyrannous' (3.2.4–5).[10] In the trial of Camillo, the assassination task, and the trial of Hermione, Leontes fights his insecurity about his behaviour by testing someone else. He seems to need to convince himself as much as anyone else that he is a good ruler.

We are entitled to wonder if Leontes is unsure that he really ought to have raised Camillo from a lowly position, and whether his ambivalence regarding such mobility slips out in his accusation of Hermione: 'she's . . . even as bad as those | That vulgars give bold'st titles' (2.1.94–6). This may mean that she is as bad as the worst names that commoners would give her (presumably, whore, slut) but the antithesis of 'vulgars' and 'bold'st title' might also suggest the promotion of commoners into the nobility; and this is in the same breath as his decrying Camillo as 'a federary with her' (2.1.92).

This possible self-condemnation comes on top of his linking of the imagined infidelity of his wife with the collapse of hierarchical social organisation:

> LEONTES You have mistook, my lady –
> Polixenes for Leontes. O, thou thing,
> Which I'll not call a creature of thy place
> Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,
> Should a like language use to all degrees,
> And mannerly distinguishment leave out
> Betwixt the prince and beggar.
> (2.1.83–9)

Leontes' tyranny seems rooted in his insecurity, and this distinguishes him from other Shakespearian tyrants such as Macbeth and Richard 3. Leontes achieves no personal advancement by his tyranny, he merely damages further his already precarious state in his attempts to assert his authority. His jealousy itself is prompted by the success of his wife, where he himself had failed, in persuading his friend to remain longer in Sicilia. The problems of his reign become entangled with his personal life and he apparently snaps. Thus, unusually for a tyrant, he does not need to be brought down: his tyranny is never competent and aggrandising. Even at the height of his autocratic rhetoric Leontes is riddled with doubts. Having insisted that 'Our prerogative | Calls not your counsels', and many similar phrases, Leontes sinks into asking 'Have I done well?' to which the reply is given 'Well done, my lord' (2.1.165–6, 189–90).

Between Perdita's loss and her restoration the play is concerned almost entirely with events in rural Bohemia. Clearly there is agricultural plenitude because a feast is being organised and Perdita is at the centre of it. Although it is not directly stated that Sicilia is suffering some kind of atrophy during this time, we leave Leontes depressed and return to him depressed. Furthermore, there is general concern that the monarch is heirless, and will not marry again. Leontes resists arguments that he has a duty to remarry, saying that no-one could match the wife he has killed. It is implied that the whole nation is in some kind of spiritual winter because of what has happened. At the sight of Florizel, Leontes exclaims 'Welcome hither, | As is the spring to the earth' (5.1.150–1). What Leontes lost through his errors of judgement was his family and his favourite, Camillo. Of these, Bohemia gains the female heir and the favourite, and Bohemia thrives.

The presence of Camillo and Perdita in Bohemia coincides with its well-being, and we might wonder if they are supposed to indicate a certain Bohemian ease about social mobility. For the sheep-shearing festival, Perdita can dress up for the occasion (albeit with some self-consciousness and anxiety) and Polixenes and Camillo can put on disguises to witness the scene as common guests. Shakespeare frequently uses dress as a metaphor for social position and the putting on of the clothes appropriate to a different class or gender to one's own as a symbolic transgression of social codes.

Autolycus's first strategy in self-advancement is to proclaim the garments that he wears to be detestable rags put on him by another who robbed him: he blames that rogue, Autolycus. The theme of clothes-make-the-man is apparent in both this exchangeableness and in his ready condemnation of himself. The clothes that are his are not 'his clothes' in the sense of him feeling them to be so; he can quickly contemplate swapping them for better ones: he may look like a tramp but has not accustomed himself mentally to his low state. Autolycus was not born to his low state, he is an ex-follower of Florizel's minor court (4.3.13–14), who is now 'out of service'. This is downward mobility, and in the character of Autolycus we might see the fluidity of the Bohemian social hierarchy. His very identity, as certified by his name, is a cloak that he feels no hesitation in casting off; it is merely one more piece of baggage that the man carries and if he can improve himself by shedding his identity and name he will do so willingly.

At the same moment Polixenes and Camillo are preparing to do the same. There is a great deal of what could be termed class-cross-dressing, the wearing of clothes appropriate to someone from a different social class to oneself, in Bohemia; Polixenes, Camillo, Florizel, Perdita, and Autolycus are all doing it. There is no class-cross-dressing in Sicilia; at least not until the Bohemians export it to there. This makes for the contrast of a modern successful state and a moribund state. Bohemia is relatively modern because there are no visible lords in Bohemia, only self-made men, and there are none but lords in Sicilia. The health and vitality of Bohemia are in contrast to Sicilia's decay and it is an injection of what makes Bohemia healthy that brings about the final transformation of Sicilia.

For all the identity swapping and class-cross-dressing in Bohemia, there is a bar to the love of Florizel and Perdita, and it is, uniquely among Shakespeare's works, a class barrier. We saw a class barrier standing between Helen and Count Bertram in *All's Well that Ends Well* and ones also exist between Malvolio and Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and between Lorenzo and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*. In those plays, however, it is possible to argue that the barred loves are not mutual ones with which the audience is supposed entirely to sympathise. Perdita is worried that for the prince to

marry a shepherd's daughter, no matter how affluent her father, is a social rise too far. At first it seems she need not have worried, for Polixenes does not object to Perdita and can see her innate worth from her demeanour.

However, Polixenes sees Perdita not as his son's potential wife but as a suitable base plant upon which the flower of Bohemian princehood may be grafted, and hence the allusive talk of grafting flowers at 4.4.86–102. Perdita rejects Polixenes' analogy with a curt:

> [PERDITA]
> No more than, were I painted, I would wish
> This youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore
> Desire to breed by me.
> (4.4.101–3)

Polixenes' view of procreation is in the classical mould where the woman provides the matter and the man, in his seed, provides the form, or putting it another way, the woman is the land and the man is the seed planted. In rejecting this Perdita is aligning herself with a much more modern view of love and sex as being freely entered into by equal partners. Polixenes' pragmatic view (where concern for the health of the royal gene-pool comes before class distinctions) is allied to his political pragmatism in putting the national well-being before questions of the propriety of giving Camillo high office. In this reading his reference to bastard flowers is even more pointed and directly relates to his desire to use Perdita to produce illegitimate children for Florizel. The irony is that his aristocratic snobbishness is misdirected because by her birth Perdita is eminently suited to marry a prince.

There is no real danger of heterogamy (marriage across class divisions) because Perdita is in fact a princess; but no-one knows this. Class-cross-dressing here involves multiple layers of appearance, deceit, and revelation. Florizel is dressing down to the level of a shepherd to match Perdita, she is dressing up to please him, they are both conforming to the rural custom of inversion at festivities. To the unwitting guests, Florizel must look like a man courting and marrying above himself but in fact he is doing the opposite (or so he supposes) but the audience knows that he is really courting his

social equal (Perdita being Leontes' long-lost daughter). It is not possible to untangle from this a definitive statement of Bohemia's embodying all that is modern in the way of views on social mobility, for the problem of Polixenes' rage at Florizel's intention to marry a shepherdess remains.

In the shepherd and his son we have a different kind of social mobility to that of Camillo: he rose by merit; they by the lucky find of Perdita and the wealth that Antigonus left with the infant. This is a social mobility of which the play seems not so approving. There is a suggestion that they are mere climbers. For example, take this ambiguous statement:

> [OLD SHEPHERD] Pray you bid
> These unknown friends to 's welcome, for it is
> A way to make us better friends, more known.
> (4.4.64–6)

Does he mean that this is the way to make us more friendly or does he mean the way to make us friends who are more socially elevated and famous? Perhaps his concern at Perdita's inactivity (he accuses her of failing in her duties as hostess) is motivated by the desire to impress these strangers, Polixenes and Camillo, in disguise.

The Old Shepherd and his son the Clown are portrayed as not worthy of the position to which their wealth has raised them; they do not have the high principles of honour that should go with it. Later in the same long scene, the Clown advises the Old Shepherd to reveal to Polixenes that he is not Perdita's true father and thereby distance themselves from Polixenes' rage at Perdita and so avoid punishment. Their moral degeneracy consists of their willingness to advance by taking a member of the aristocracy into their family but not taking responsibility for her, not being willing to fall from grace if she does.

When the Old Shepherd and his son achieve a permanent elevation at the end of the play, there is much ironic playing with their notions of themselves as gentlemen:

> AUTOLYCUS I know you are now, sir, a gentleman born.
> CLOWN Ay, and have been so any time these four hours.

OLD SHEPHERD And so have I, boy.
(5.2.134–6)

Social mobility is not represented as an unadulterated good. There is mobility in Bohemia and there is material plenitude (enough for a festival) but there is an underlying social/psychological problem: Polixenes retains a residual aristocratic snobbery as shown by his deriding of the low-born Old Shepherd. But the Old Shepherd is not necessarily worthy of respect either; this is clear from his own snobbery. Shakespeare seems to be trying to hedge his bets and have the resolution be some kind of synthesis of the rigid Sicilian feudal organisation and the fluid, perhaps too fluid, society of Bohemia. There is something deeply uncomfortable about the Old Shepherd and his son's willingness to renounce Perdita to save their skins, and about their strutting around Sicilia as newly-made gentlemen. Perhaps something valuable of the rigid aristocratic ideal of Leontes' Sicilia is lacking in the bourgeois state of Bohemia which conditioned them.

The Winter's Tale is a narrative of social mobility and its virtues. Camillo seems worthy of his rise, the Old Shepherd and the Clown do not. We could read as genuine honour showing through Camillo's self-communion that he would not kill a king even if he could find examples in fiction or history to show that it would lead to his prospering. The added comment that in fact history and fiction do not give examples we might say is self-justification, as if to convince himself that altruism and self-preservation are not in conflict but rather point him to the same course:

[CAMILLO] If I could find example
Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
And flourished after, I'd not do 't. But since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment bears not one,
Let villainy itself forswear 't.
(1.2.358–62)

The word 'anoint' appears twenty-five times in Shakespeare's works and almost always in the context of the anointing of monarchs. That is, Shakespeare uses the word when a character refers

to the doctrine of divine right, the anointing being the application of holy oil in the religious ceremony of coronation. Camillo's honour is displayed in this respect for the traditional view of monarchy and in his putting principle above material gain.

Because they have in common their themes of sex, pregnancy, international travel and social class, it is not unreasonable to read *All's Well that Ends Well* as Shakespeare's first exploration of a new kind of writing, the Romances, that *The Winter's Tale* epitomises. If anything, Shakespeare made the awkward elements more pronounced with each new play he wrote in this period, for although there is a war in *All's Well that Ends Well* the only reported casualty of the war is the Duke of Siena's brother whom Bertram is reputed to have killed 'with his own hand' (3.5.6). In a war so generally free of overt violence this duke is even more unlucky than the four English nobles who died alongside twenty-five English commoners killing 10,000 Frenchmen in Shakespeare's telling of the battle of Agincourt (*Henry 5* 4.8.80–106).

In *The Winter's Tale*, on the other hand, innocent young Mamillius dies seemingly without strong dramatic reason (other than to make Leontes aware of what he had done), and although he is engaged in the immoral act of exposing a child (having talked Leontes out of simply burning it to death), Antigonus's destruction and consumption by a bear seem problematically unjustified. In these kinds of plays, criteria of justification that applied to Shakespeare's earlier works seem curiously inapplicable. At the same time as he introduced entirely fantastical, quasi-magical elements (such as the apparent awakening of Hermione's statue), Shakespeare brought in a kind of realism hitherto absent in his works for, contrary to the usual rules of dramatic genre, in real life good people do die for no reason.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- In reusing recognisable dramatic situations such as the lamenting of a visibly grieving child of a recently deceased parent, Shakespeare was able to generate, and if he wished to deflate, audience expectations.

- Shakespeare set himself dramatic challenges such as making an audience sympathise with a young woman who forces a man into a marriage he does not want.
- At crucial moments – the lords' responses to Helen in *All's Well that Ends Well*, Hermione's behaviour with Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* – the choices made by actors in performance greatly influence the meaning of what follows these moments. In such cases, the text has merely potential meaning until those choices are made.
- We may track a dramatic device such as the seeking or giving of prophecies across Shakespeare's career, and argue that the expectations raised by one occurrence is conditioned by its use on previous occasions.
- A play that is not obviously about class, such as *The Winter's Tale*, can be read as having a subtextual interest in class, just as a play that is obviously about class, such as *All's Well that Ends Well*, can be without much concern for this aspect.
- The problems of *All's Well that Ends Well* can be understood as Shakespeare's means of developing a new kind of dramatic writing, the Romances, towards the end of his career.

NOTES

1. David Thatcher, 'Shakespeare's *All's Well*: The Case of Bertram's Letter', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 53 (1998), 77–80.
2. Ibid., p. 78.
3. W. David Kay, 'Reforming the Prodigal: Dramatic Paradigms, Male Sexuality, and the Power of Shame in *All's Well That Ends Well*', in *Re-visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 108–27, p. 109.
4. Robert Weimann, 'Performing at the Frontiers of Representation: Epilogue and Post-scriptural Future in Shakespeare's Plays', in *The Arts of Performance in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama: Essays for G. K. Hunter*, ed. Murray Biggs, Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank, and Eugene

M. Waith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 96–112, p. 102.
5. William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. Barbara Everett, New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 38–9.
6. B. J. Sokol, *Art and Illusion in* The Winter's Tale (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 42–53.
7. Howard Felperin, *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 35–55.
8. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).
9. Robert Greene, *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, STC 12285 (London: Thomas Orwin for Thomas Cadman, 1588), C2r.
10. Paul N. Siegel, 'Leontes a Jealous Tyrant', *Review of English Studies*, 1 (1950), 302–7, 306.

Part II Critical Approaches

CHAPTER 5

Authority and Authorship: *Measure for Measure*

We have considered a representative sample of Shakespeare's plays taken under a set of generic headings, asking what makes for genre distinctions, how audiences might have perceived them, and whether the plays fit into tidy categories. In this second half of the book the focus shifts from 'types of plays' to 'approaches to plays', or in other words how critics have come at the plays from a number of predetermined angles, how the plays seem when we pursue a motivated line of enquiry.

Of course, it might be said that looking at the plays from the point of view of genre was itself a motivated line of enquiry, but we can at least say that in Shakespeare's own time people thought of his works in that way. After all, the first complete works edition, the 1623 Folio, was explicitly entitled *Master William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. No-one can accuse a genre-based approach of anachronism. Now, however, we will be deliberately anachronistic: we will look at the plays from the point of view of certain modern concerns. In turn, we will consider 'authority and authorship', 'performance', 'identities', and 'materialism'.

Although these words, or their near-equivalents, existed in Shakespeare's time, we will use them to ask whether, how, and why Shakespeare matters to us in the present. To do this we will have to recover certain historical facts about the plays and how they were performed, so we will start with consideration of the fact that Shakespeare is both a subject of history (we can excavate the past to

understand his life and career) and an ongoing cultural concern in the present. For us his works carry a cultural and social authority – in many countries all recipients of university degrees in the humanities have to pass an examination on Shakespeare – so we will first use that notion of 'authority' to inspect Shakespeare's own control over his personal authority in respect of his plays, examined through the lens of past and present.

HISTORY: THEN

All plays from the distant past, indeed all literary works from the distant past, have something of their own time about them and yet they also transcend their own time to speak to us now. They must, of necessity, have one foot in the past and one foot in the present because obviously no text can be entirely free of the habits of thought that were current at the time it was written, and yet the fact that we read and understand it now must mean that it is not so locked into its own time that we find it just baffling now. Because we are able to read old works and make some sense of them, because we find a way into them, must mean that they belong both to 'then' and to 'now'.

In the case of *Measure for Measure*, the precise chronological 'then' is actually very easy to define: the play was performed by the company of actors that Shakespeare belonged to, called the King's men, on 26 December 1604 before the court of King James in the Banqueting Hall in Westminster. We know this because the account book that records payments to actors is quite explicit:

By his ma*jesties* plaiers:	On St Stivens night in the hall A play Calde Mesur for Mesur	Shaxberd:[1]

St Steven's day is Boxing Day. Notice that the person named as collecting the money is Shakespeare, of which name Shaxberd was an acceptable variant at this time. The clerk making the record had no particular reason to ask Shakespeare if he preferred one spelling over another.

This Revels Accounts entry gives us the earliest evidence for the existence of Shakespeare's play, but it is vitally important to be clear that this does not necessarily tell us about the first performance. Any play that is performed more than once (and this play has been performed thousands of times) must have a first performance, but what we are looking at in the above record is the first evidence of performance, which is not the same thing at all. This record is the first mention of the play in the historical archive – that is, among all the documents that historians know about – but it is entirely possible that this archive is incomplete, that there were records of earlier performances but that those records have since been lost. Alternatively, the play may have had an earlier performance that generated no record at all.

Millions of documents were lost in the Great Fire of London of 1666, of course, and moreover many documents are just not kept safe by anyone after their primary purpose has been fulfilled. Until recently, paper was such an expensive commodity that once the primary purpose of a document had been fulfilled the paper might well be recycled for something else, such as storing salt (another valuable commodity until recently) or for lining pie-tins. In this particular case, there is an additional reason strongly to suspect that this record does not tell us about the first performance of the play: we know that plays generally had their first performances before the public in the theatres of Jacobean London and only when they had been thoroughly rehearsed and approved before the public were they performed before the court.

We can get some further sense of the historical difference between then and now if we think about the premises on which certain scenes in the play are based. An example is Act 4, Scene 3. You will recall that Angelo orders the death of Claudio and demands to be sent the severed head as proof, but the duke and the provost decide to give him someone else's head instead. There is another prisoner awaiting execution, and since he is going to die anyway and looks a bit like Claudio, he will do. Unfortunately, he is drunk:

> DUKE (*to Barnardine*) Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hastily you are to depart, I am come to

advise you, comfort you, and pray with you.
BARNARDINE Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.
DUKE O sir, you must; and therefore, I beseech you,
Look forward on the journey you shall go.
BARNARDINE
I swear I will not die today, for any man's persuasion.
DUKE But hear you –
BARNARDINE Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I today. *Exit*
DUKE Unfit to live or die. O gravel heart!
(4.3.47–61)

Barnadine has access to alcohol in prison, but whereas in modern prisons this is illicit and secretive (because it would attract punishment), Barnadine seems not in the least abashed. Moreover he seems able to argue not for mercy but for a reprieve until he has sobered up. One of the several bizarre aspects of capital punishment is that those who exact it insist that the victim be in the right frame of mind – the prisoner has to comprehend what is being taken away – and Barnadine's stupor makes him unfit for execution. The state has the power over his body but not over his mind, and the duke (who is pretending to be a friar) is reluctant to damn his soul by sending him to his death without access to the Catholic sacrament of absolution for his sins.

Barnadine might be pretending. Barnard's Law was a confidence trick for cheating at cards in which one con-man plays against another, called the Barnard, who feigns drunkenness. Once we know this bit of historical knowledge, there emerges the possibility of an extra layer of deception going on. As J. J. M. Tobin puts it,

> With such a trick Barnadine, a drunk who is no drunk would join a friar who is really no friar but a Duke, an Angelo who is no angel, a Mariana who is not Isabel and all the other mistaken appearances in the play.[2]

In the event, Barnadine is not executed and as luck would have it another prisoner dies of natural causes in the night and his head may be sent to Angelo to make him think that Claudio has been executed.

Turning to the title of the play enables us to explore further what thinking historically involves. It is worth knowing that the Old Testament principle invoked by the title of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' was intended not to promote savagery but to limit it. The idea was that in response to someone taking out an eye or tooth the victim's kin could in return take out the perpetrator's eye or tooth, but no more than that. That is, the rule was to prevent escalation of conflict.

But, should we understand 'measure for measure' as meaning the same thing as 'an eye for an eye'? The duke explains that he has to have Angelo executed at the end because: ' "An Angelo for Claudio, death for death". | Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure; | Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure' (5.1.406–8). This certainly sounds like one death compensating for another. And yet in the biblical gospel of Luke we find a quite different use of the same phrasing:

> Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:
> Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.
> (Luke 6:37–8)

This is a version of what is called the Golden Rule: do to others as you would have others do to you. This is the opposite of a vengeful principle of 'an eye for an eye'. Or rather, it is the mirror image of the same principle: where 'an eye for an eye' threatens to turn into a vicious circle – the person punished might feel the need to start a fresh wave of reprisal, and so on indefinitely – the principle of 'do to others as you would have them do to you' flips this vicious circle over into a virtuous circle of mutually reinforcing beneficence.

In this we can see an important lesson about historical context. To explain the duke's lines, one critic might cite the Old Testament

principles of vengeful justice and say that the duke is being religious but in a pre-Christian way. Another critic might also turn to the bible, but point out the passage from Luke and say that the duke's phrasing and the fact that he does not, in the end, have Angelo executed shows the triumph of Christian mercy. When someone brings forth a document such as the bible to provide an historical context, we must always remember that historical evidence is never a matter of something given and factual, it is a matter of selection of contextualising authorities and that who is selecting the authorities and why are important questions to ask before accepting the evidence. Contrary to popular conception, facts do not speak for themselves.

PROPOSING TO ISABELLA

As facts of the matter, the events of the play itself also present us with interpretative choices. There are several proposed marriages at the end of *Measure for Measure*, and they do not conform to the usual generic formulations of Romantic Comedy. In particular, we should consider this one:

> PROVOST
> This is another prisoner that I saved,
> Who should have died when Claudio lost his head,
> As like almost to Claudio as himself.
> *He unmuffles Claudio*
> DUKE (*to Isabella*)
> If he be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardoned; and for your lovely sake
> Give me your hand, and say you will be mine.
> He is my brother too. But fitter time for that.
> By this Lord Angelo perceives he's safe.
> (5.1.486–93)

The provost uncovers Claudio, Isabella's brother, whom she thinks is dead, and we may suppose that she reacts in some way. Perhaps she rushes over to him, or stares at him in disbelief, or perhaps she

faints; the script does not tell us but we have to suppose she does something. And what does the duke do at this climactic moment? He proposes marriage to Isabella: 'Give me your hand, and say you will be mine. | He is my brother too'.

He is right to check himself, for almost any other time would be a 'fitter time for that'. But the duke is impatient and within fifty lines (about two to three minutes of stage time) he makes his proposal again (5.1.534–6). We have to wonder what Isabella makes of this repetition of the marriage proposal. We have to wonder, because Shakespeare simply does not tell us. The script has the duke twice offer Isabella marriage right at the end of the play, just where it should according to the familiar conventions of Romantic Comedy, and extraordinarily Shakespeare gives Isabella no lines with which to answer.

What is the actor playing Isabella to do? One option is to faint, if she has not already fainted at the sight of her supposedly dead brother. Assuming she remains conscious, she could stare at the duke incredulously, as if to indicate that this is the last thing she wanted. Alternatively, she might smile at him adoringly as if to indicate that this is precisely what she has wanted all along, but was not going to say so. Perhaps she does not hear the duke's proposal. If she fainted at the sight of Claudio perhaps she is still unconscious and just coming around when the duke proposes marriage, which would add to the sense of awkwardness at the play's close. Another way to have Isabella not be conscious of the duke's proposal is for her to be intently wrapped up with her brother, hugging and kissing him, so that she does not notice what the duke is saying; this would account for him having to repeat the offer.

All these alternatives are possible ways of handling the moment, and the actors and director working on any production of the play have to decide for themselves how the play ends. This is a particularly good example of how, unlike say a poem or a novel, a playscript is a radically unclosed literary object. A play's final meaning only ever comes into being when someone decides how to stage this moment. The same applies, but less obviously, for every moment of every scene of a play, for they are full of tiny choices: 'shall I turn to him now, or when he calls me the second time?', 'shall I exit via the same door that X is coming in, so that our paths cross and

I know she has arrived, or shall I exit via the other door so that I never learn whether she made it?', and so forth.

Historical knowledge can help fill some of these gaps, but not others. It can tell us whether to play Barnadine as a genuine drunk or just a con-artist who gets away with pretending to be drunk. It can tell us what it was like to be a nun or a prostitute at a certain time in history, and so illuminate what Shakespeare may have had in mind and what his audiences made of what they saw and heard. It can tell us that the word 'nunnery' itself meant both a place where nuns lived and what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls 'A house of ill fame', that is, a brothel. When Hamlet yells 'Get thee to a nunnery, go' (3.1.139–40) at Ophelia, he is either telling her to live a life without sex at all or to live a life of constant sex in return for money.

BEING A NUN

One of the options I listed for Isabella's reaction to the duke's proposal was her flashing a look to the duke that indicated that marriage is the last thing she wants. We can find textual support for this idea elsewhere in the play, for Isabella seems at the beginning to want to be a nun. This is how the play's third scene begins:

> *Enter Isabella, and Francesca, a nun*
> ISABELLA And have you nuns no farther privileges?
> FRANCESCA Are not these large enough?
> ISABELLA
> Yes, truly. I speak not as desiring more,
> But rather wishing a more strict restraint
> Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare.
> LUCIO (*within*) Ho, peace be in this place
> (1.3.1–6)

Noticeably, she says 'you nuns', not 'we nuns': she has not yet entered the order of Saint Clare and with Lucio's arrival comes news of her brother's imprisonment, so she does not get a chance to.

The obvious question to ask is whether Isabella really wants to be a nun? If she does, and if she anticipates that once it is all over with Claudio's release she can get back to entering the nunnery, then the duke's proposal of marriage is especially awkward. She must be grateful to him for saving her brother, but she really wants a contemplative religious life without sex. Indeed, looking at all these events with a most cynical eye, you might say that Angelo tried one way to get sex with Isabella and failed, and the duke is trying another way and looks like he could succeed. Such a view of the duke would certainly make sense of all the unnecessary grief he puts Isabella through in deliberately making her think that Claudio had died, which is one of the play's real conundrums regarding motivation.

On the other hand, one might take a more optimistic view of all this and say that because the play's ending seems to imply that Isabella and the duke get married, live happily ever after, and so fulfil the conventions of Romantic Comedy, a theatre director is entitled to work backwards and let the ending determine what goes before. In performance, there could be opportunities for Isabella and the duke to exchange meaningful glances in which their eyes meet, nothing is said, but a world of romantic sighing and longing is silently communicated. To do this would in no way run counter to the evidence of the script, because indeed the script is simply silent on the matter of what, if anything, Isabella and the duke feel for one another.

MEANING: NOW

To think in this way about performance is not to impose on the texts an alien perspective derived from the world of the theatre, but rather to put the plays in the context that certainly existed for Shakespeare when he wrote them. The scholarly consensus until recently was that Shakespeare had no concern to get his plays published, so that we would be looking at the wrong kind of evidence if we confined ourselves to what happens in reading the play. The recently revived view of Shakespeare as a literary dramatist was discussed in the introduction to this book and will come up again in the conclusion.

Even if this is true – and scholars are hotly debating it – it is worth recalling that performance would be the means of dissemination that reached the greater number of people. Because theatres were large and popular, and because printruns of books were small and literacy was fairly low, theatregoing was the mass medium of Shakespeare's age and reading was a minority interest.

If what Shakespeare cared about was performance, not book publishing, then what is for us the open-ended question of how Isabella and the duke behave towards one another is something he could simply have told the actors. 'Do it like this', Shakespeare might have said to the man playing the duke and the boy playing Isabella – all female parts were, of course, played by boys – 'because really, you know, they are falling in love'. Perhaps Shakespeare directed his actor in such a fashion, but we do not have access to that evidence. This aspect of the play's rootedness in its own moment of creation, the authorial instructions to the first actors, has simply been lost over historical time, and we have to make the decisions afresh for ourselves. Until the decisions are made, the meaning of the play is not completed. And even when it has been completed by one production of the play, another director and a group of actors can complete the same play's meaning in an entirely different way next time.

Thus, to reiterate this crucial point, the meaning is not completed until the play is performed and even then it is completed only provisionally, just for this time. This makes the notion of the term 'author', the one with the authority, the power, over the meanings of the work, rather different for plays than it is for other works that one might study. To an important extent, the authority of the author is dispersed among the performance group that makes a production of the play, and simply put Shakespeare has less to do with the meanings of his plays than, say, Byron has to do with the meanings of his poems or Charles Dickens has to do with the meanings of his novels. Of course, poets and novelists expect readers to use their imaginations, but such works are considerably more 'finished' when they appear in the final written form than are a dramatist's works, for which writing is not the ultimate end.

This is one of the reasons why people go back many times to see the same Shakespeare play done afresh by new people: they want to

see how the same indeterminacies in the text are closed this time. The same is true of criticism, including the criticism that students undertake for their studies, and scholars undertake in their books such as this one. When one writes an essay one chooses to privilege one potential meaning over another, to focus on one aspect (say, the relationship of the duke and Isabella) over another (say, the relationship of Pompey to his new master Abhorson), to suppress certain aspects of the text and to foreground others. Like a theatre director, a critic or a student makes choices of selection that amount to a completing of the play's meaning, and like theirs this is a provisional completion, just for now. Theatre directing and criticism are two forms of the same process.

To do this work, we often have to ask ourselves straightforward questions about the characters, such as whether Isabella really wants to be a nun. Bernice Kliman pointed out that Isabella and Claudio seem to be orphans: there is no mention of their parents and the only reason Claudio and Juliet had not married earlier (and so avoided the crime of premarital sex) was that they were waiting for a dowry coming to her.[3] For a dowerless young woman like Isabella, entering an order of nuns might not be so much a matter of will as economic necessity. And that, of course, links the nuns to the prostitutes: the latter do what they do for economic necessity, and the play is very frank about the cash basis of sex, both in prostitution and in marriage. Shakespeare is careful to make clear that it is dowry trouble, pure economics, that prevents the marriages of Angelo and Mariana, and of Claudio and Juliet.

However, that is not how the duke sees things. His version of the recent history of Vienna is that the state has let the degenerates get the upper hand:

> DUKE
> We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
> Which for this fourteen years we have let slip;
> Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave
> That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
> Having bound up the threat'ning twigs of birch
> Only to stick it in their children's sight

> For terror, not to use, in time the rod
> More mocked becomes than feared: so our decrees,
> Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead;
> And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,
> The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
> Goes all decorum.
> (1.3.19–31)

We might imagine the duke getting increasingly hysterical during this speech, for his images start out a little eccentric in their mix of the abstract and the concrete – laws as a kind of weedkiller – and end up really quite bizarre: the abstractions of liberty and justice enacted in a kind of Punch-and-Judy fight, complete with the baby who has managed to get hold of the stick.

That is one account of the last fourteen years in Vienna, and it gives one explanation of why the genial and wise old statesman Escalus is passed over and the power given into the hands of the new man Angelo: it takes a strong, fresh hand to curb these new deviant excesses. But what the play dramatises is not the evil perpetrated by the deviant thieves and prostitutes: throughout these are comic figures who speak plainly and wittily about sin, criminality, and the hypocrisy of the legal system. Rather, the main evil of the play comes from the central man of authority, Angelo himself, who is just as guilty of lechery as those he condemns, and what is worse his power enables him to live out his fantasies far more than an ordinary lecher could. So, we have an 'official' history coming from those at the top of Viennese society, and another quite different narrative coming from those below and from the play's events.

Once again, but this time inside the play, history is shown to be subject to interpretation. In adjudicating between such competing versions of history, critics have recently been concerned to listen closely to the views 'from below', as it were, and one of the most influential recent readings of the play that does this is Jonathan Dollimore's.[4] Dollimore builds on the ideas about institutions of authority advanced by French theorist Michel Foucault and notes that critics have tended to believe the claim made by the authority figures in the play that unrestrained sexuality threatens the state, and so they have tended to think that Angelo is an excessive man

who is nonetheless doing what he does for essentially the right reasons. For Dollimore, this is a familiar claim made by the powerful to justify authoritarian reaction to all sorts of threat that they perceive might be emerging from amongst the oppressed, and the real subject of the play – from which all the talk of sexual corruption is just a distraction – is the political corruption among the rulers; sexual deviants become scapegoats for wider problems.

The demand made by the play's rulers for personal integrity is a means of exerting authority, and what annoys the duke most is the subversive slandering that he is powerless to silence:

> DUKE
> No might nor greatness in mortality
> Can censure scape; back-wounding calumny
> The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong
> Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?
> (3.1.444–7)

The resolution of the play, according to Dollimore, is not the ending of authoritarianism, but rather the victory of omniscient rule achieved through the duke's disguise and plotting. The transgressors in the play are 'exploited to legitimate an exercise in authoritarian repression'.[5] The brothels, which publicly manifest personal desire, were in London strictly controlled through bribery and were often owned by the same people who operated theatres. Transgression is not a good thing in the play – Angelo is as transgressive as any denizen of brothels – but it is the occasion for revealing strategies of power.

A political reading that attends to views 'from below' need not be as pessimistic as Dollimore's, however. As Kiernan Ryan observes, the play's sequence of X for Y substitutions is long: Angelo for the duke as ruler, Escalus for Angelo in the trial of Elbow, Mariana for Isabella in bed with Angelo, Mariana's virginity for Claudio's head, Barnadine's head for Claudio's head, Ragusine's head for Barnadine's head, and Pompey's old trade of prostitution for his new one of executioner.[6] For Ryan this sequence is noticeable for its crossing of class boundaries (every social class of person is involved), so it is a universal principle in Vienna that is matched by

symmetries in the play's language such as the closing chiasmus of 'What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine' (5.1.536). Because these substitutions cut across class boundaries, Ryan reads the play as an optimistic expression of common human values.

It is hard to see how Dollimore and Ryan can both be right, and in choosing between them the most important criterion seems to be whether one wants a pessimistic or an optimistic interpretation of the play. Our investigation appears to be getting intolerably subjective – the play seems to mean whatever we want it to mean – and for this reason let us change our perspective and see if something objective can be recovered by attending to another kind of authority: the author's authority over his text. After all, Shakespeare could not have meant the play to be simultaneously pessimistic and optimistic, and by returning to what he thought he was up to we might find a firmer grounding for our readings.

RECOVERING SHAKESPEARE'S VERSION

Let us return to the moment of the play's composition, and think about its existence as a material object, as writing on paper. Normally we do not treat literature or drama in this way, but rather treat the text as a transparent window through which we perceive what the writer wanted us to see. It is, however, an especially interesting exercise to undertake in respect of this play because something, somewhere is wrong with the text of *Measure for Measure*.

To see why textual critics perceive a problem in the writing of *Measure for Measure*, consider the following extract in which the duke, having persuaded Isabella to trick Angelo that he is having sex with her when he is really having sex with Mariana, now has to get Isabella to persuade Mariana to go along with it:

DUKE
Take then this your companion by the hand,
Who hath a story ready for your ear.
I shall attend your leisure; but make haste,
The vaporous night approaches.
MARIANA (*To Isabella*)

Will 't please you walk aside?
[*Exeunt Mariana and Isabella*]
DUKE
O place and greatness, millions of false eyes
Are stuck upon thee; volumes of report
Run with their false and most contrarious quest
Upon thy doings; thousand escapes of wit
Make thee the father of their idle dream,
And rack thee in their fancies.
[*Enter Mariana and Isabella*]
Welcome. How agreed?
(4.1.54–63)

Mariana and Isabella disappear for just six lines of speech from the duke – about eighteen seconds of stage time – during which we are supposed to believe that Isabella fills Mariana in on the whole plot, her part in it, and soothes any qualms that Mariana might have. It all seems rather unrealistic. But perhaps we could argue here, as we might regarding the bed-trick, that realism is not the point. Shakespeare, after all, is often unrealistic.

Consider, though, the content of those six lines: 'O place and greatness . . . thee in their fancies' (4.1.58–63). Shakespeare has his characters say strange things from time to time, but it is especially odd that a speech about how the powerful – those with 'place' and 'greatness' – are subject to slander should appear here, since it has nothing to do with anything in this scene. It sounds like a piece of writing pasted in from another place altogether.

There's another problem with the action of the play at the start of Act 4. The act begins with Mariana and a singing boy:

Mariana [*discovered*] *with a Boy singing*
BOY
Take, O take those lips away
That so sweetly were forsworn,
And those eyes, the break of day
Lights that do mislead the morn;
But my kisses bring again, bring again,
Seals of love, though sealed in vain, sealed in vain.

Enter the Duke, disguised as a friar
MARIANA
Break off thy song, and haste thee quick away.
(4.1.1–7)

The previous act ended with a fairly long soliloquy by the duke, beginning 'He who the sword of heaven will bear | Should be as holy as severe' (3.1.517–18) and running on for another twenty lines before the duke exits. Nothing the duke says in that speech sets us up for this opening of Act 4.

Indeed, when watching the play it is hard to know who is this woman sitting with a singing boy unless one is already familiar with the play. Even once the duke has arrived, there is no hint in the dialogue about who Mariana is. Now, we might say that it is obvious who Mariana is: she is Mariana, betrothed to Angelo and dumped by him when her dowry was lost at sea, as told to us when told by the duke to Isabella. The trouble is, in performance no-one reads out the stage-direction '*Mariana* [*discovered*] *with a Boy singing*' and no-one reads out the speech-prefix 'MARIANA' that we see in the printed text. In performance, a person's identity is unknown until it is mentioned in dialogue, and no-one uses Mariana's name in this scene for another forty lines or so. This seems dramatically clumsy, and one cannot help wondering why Shakespeare would do it.

The answer seems to be connected with this song, 'Take, O take those lips away', which Mariana interrupts. As was shown by Gary Taylor and John Jowett, whose work on the textual problems I have been paraphrasing,[7] this song was well-known in the seventeenth century: there are dozens of texts of it with a second stanza added after this one and with music for it written by the composer John Wilson who was born in 1595. In 1604, when Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure*, Wilson would only have been nine years old, so we may assume that he did not write the music for the first performance. The song also appears in full in a play by John Fletcher called *Rollo, Duke of Normandy*, which we know was written after 1617. So, either Fletcher took over Shakespeare's song and added a second stanza, or Fletcher wrote the song for his play *Rollo* and it somehow got cut down and inserted into *Measure for Measure* which was written about fifteen years earlier. How could that

happen: how could a song written later get into a play written earlier?

Let us survey the problems outlined so far. We have a puzzling beginning to Act 4 of Shakespeare's play, with half of a song that we know was used in full in another play fifteen years later. The same puzzling beginning also delays telling the audience who this woman with the singing boy is, and then this woman and another go offstage for about eighteen seconds to discuss an intricate deception that they are going to practise on the duke's deputy Angelo. While they are off stage the duke gives a seemingly irrelevant speech about place and greatness. To help to see the solution to all this, let us remind ourselves of certain dates. Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure* around 1604. Shakespeare died in 1616. Fletcher wrote *Rollo, Duke of Normandy* some time after 1617. The first complete works of Shakespeare, known now as the Folio, was published in 1623 and it contains the first printing of *Measure for Measure*.

The best solution to all the problems is to suppose that around 1617–20 someone (Thomas Middleton is the prime suspect) altered the text of *Measure for Measure* (prior to its first publication) including putting into it the first stanza of the popular song 'Take, O take those lips away' that Fletcher wrote for his play and for which the 22-year-old John Wilson wrote the music. When the play was written there were no intervals used in performance: the play ran continuously as a collection of scenes, but by the late 1610s the theatres were punctuating performances with four intervals, making the play into five acts. After an interval the players (then as now) want to begin again with something striking, and hence opening Act 4 with a popular song made sense. To put this song into the beginning of Act 4 they also moved other parts of the text around, and in particular they moved the twenty-line soliloquy beginning 'He who the sword of heaven will bear | Should be as holy as severe' that originally covered the time that Mariana and Isabella were offstage from near the start of Act 4 to the end of Act 3. And they moved the short speech 'Oh place and greatness' that the duke gives at the end of Act 3 (in response to Lucio's false accusations against the duke and Escalus's mistaken faith in Angelo's goodness) to put into the now-vacant slot where Mariana and Isabella are offstage.

It is not essential to grasp all the textual minutiae here; Taylor and Jowett argue the case at length and with detail I have omitted. The important point to note is that we can explain much of what is wrong with *Measure for Measure* not by thinking of it in terms of themes, complexities of genre, and Shakespeare's interest in the problematic and the anxiety-inducing, but rather by thinking of it as a written text that changed over time. Specifically, we can solve the problems by supposing that the text that we have (first published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death) is not how Shakespeare wrote it but rather reflects unauthorised alterations by someone else.

Taylor and Jowett's hypothesis explains other problems too. In the first scene, Mistress Overdone seems to know that Claudio is being taken to prison and what for (1.2.58–71). Then Pompey enters, and in talking to him Mistress Overdone seems suddenly to have forgotten about Claudio and his crime ('what's his offence?') and reacts as though it were news to her. Since both exchanges serve primarily to inform the audience that Claudio has been arrested for having premarital sex, it is likely that one of them was written as a replacement for the other. That is, it seems likely that the actors were supposed to act one or the other of them, but not both, and that the printer failed to notice that one of them was marked for deletion. Since we have reason to suppose that after Shakespeare's death someone revised the text, this too might be an example of the revision: a new version of the 'news about Claudio' moment was written and was supposed to replace the old one.

Increasingly, critics are coming to accept that the text of *Measure for Measure* as we have it is not how Shakespeare wrote it, that there are other agencies at work. Thinking back to the second scene and its strange political talk about all the dukes coming to composition with the duke of Hungary, this would have been highly topical material in relation to European politics around 1619 – three years after Shakespeare's death – but would have made no sense at all when the play was first written in 1604.[8] This too seems to be part of posthumous interpolation of material for a revival of the play fifteen years after it was written. We can go further: in 1604, when *Measure for Measure* was first written, almost no-one in London would have any preconceptions about Vienna: the city was almost unheard of and not discussed. In 1619, on the other hand, all the

talk was of Vienna. It is noticeable that the names in the play are not Austrian but Italian: Lucio, Claudio, Isabella. In all probability, Shakespeare did not even set the play in Vienna: that too was an alteration made to the text after Shakespeare's death.[9]

What should we do with the text of *Measure for Measure* if we believe that Shakespeare wrote it not to be set in Vienna but in some Italian city (perhaps Ferrara, Taylor's likeliest guess), and if we believe that we can identify the order of the speeches as he originally wrote them? Should we try to put the text back as we think it was when Shakespeare wrote it? Before answering we ought to consider the loss if this makes all the criticism of the play that has been written over the last 400 years redundant. To put it more fundamentally: is there, in an historical sense, a 'Shakespeare' to go back to in our researches, and in relation to whose actions we can modify the text as we receive it, or should we just accept the text we have, warts and all?

The answers to these questions will depend on what one thinks is the point of doing criticism of Shakespeare. In a model of critical commentary in which we imagine that each generation simply adds a fresh interpretative bandage to the mummified body of 'Shakespeare', the above insights are destined to become merely the typical examples of what early twenty-first-century critics concerned themselves with. On the other hand, if you believe that historical approaches allow us to travel back in time then the above comments might constitute the unwrapping of a few of the bandages surrounding the body of 'Shakespeare'. It might, in this view, be possible to get back to the beginning, before all the accreted layers of interpretation by different generations. By assiduous work of uncovering the past we might arrive back in the early seventeenth century. In all likelihood, the 'Shakespeare' we find there is not like the one with which we are familiar.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The first recorded performance of a play is not necessarily the first performance. Plays were usually played first to the public and only later to the court. The authority of the court did not mean its members saw plays first.

- Appeals to biblical authority are shown to be highly suspect, even though the play seems to be named from one.
- By acts of historical investigation we can recover something of the contexts of ideas – how people thought about sex, religion, and power – within which the play was written. In general these are most unlike twenty-first-century ideas.
- For all that historiographical investigations strive to get to 'the facts', we must recognise that they are matters of interpretation. (Facts do not speak for themselves.)
- As we have seen in other plays, a great deal depends on what the actors choose to do at particular moments, so we cannot speak of the text's meanings, only of a particular performance's meanings. Performance has its own authority that is somewhat independent of textual authority.
- Critics are now cautious about uncritically accepting the accounts of Vienna's recent past given by the figures of authority, the rulers, and are more interested in the accounts of those over whom they rule.
- Rather than treat the text of the play as a given, we can historicise its creation. It was made not by a single act of authorial composition, but rather came about by a process of composition and revision spread over time.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1.
2. J. J. M. Tobin, 'How Drunken Was Barnadine?', *Notes and Queries*, 248 (2003), 46–7.
3. Bernice W. Kliman, 'Isabella in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 15 (1982), 137–48, 138–9.
4. Jonathan Dollimore, 'Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*', in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 72–87.
5. Ibid, p. 84.

6. Kiernan Ryan, '*Measure for Measure*: Marxism Before Marx', in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 227–44.
7. Gary Taylor and John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped: 1606–1623* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 107–236.
8. John Jowett, 'The Audacity of *Measure for Measure* in 1621', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 8 (2001), 229–47.
9. Gary Taylor, 'Shakespeare's Mediterranean *Measure for Measure*', in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress at Valencia 2001*, ed. Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vicente Fores (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 243–69.

CHAPTER 6

Performance: *Macbeth*

Just as we saw with *Measure for Measure* in the previous chapter, there is evidence that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as we have it is not the play as Shakespeare left it. After he finished it and before it was first printed, someone else made changes. The suspect, as with *Measure for Measure*, is the dramatist Thomas Middleton, and as before the central clue is musical. In the 1623 Folio, our only authority for this play, Hecate is called away in scene 3.5 by a song sung 'within' (meaning offstage, out of sight) that begins 'Come away, come away'. Only this first line is given, the rest being indicated by 'etcetera' and a stage direction for 'Music and a song'. Likewise, in the next scene but one, there is another direction for 'Music and a song' and the song begins 'Black spirits' and continues with an 'etcetera'.

Full songs with these opening lines – 'Come away, come away' and 'Black spirits' – appear in Middleton's play *The Witch* that he wrote about 1613, seven years after Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*. Since it is unlikely that Shakespeare, when composing *Macbeth*, wrote only the first lines of a pair of songs and that Middleton later expanded them by providing the remaining lines, the obvious inference is that Middleton's songs were inserted into Shakespeare's play some time after 1613, when Shakespeare was no longer active in the theatre. This helps make sense of the dialogue around the songs, and especially Hecate's lines introducing the dance routine ('Ay, sir, all this . . . his welcome pay' 4.1.141–8), which readers have

long found to be out of keeping with the style of the rest of the play. The suspect dialogue, the songs, and the dancing are probably all insertions that we should not associate with Shakespeare.[1]

If these songs and the dance were part of performances of the play in the 1610s (before the first printing in 1623) – and there is independent evidence from an adaptation in 1672–3 that they were – what then should appear in modern editions of *Macbeth*? It would be absurd to print just the first line of each song (as the 1623 Folio does) since the rest of each song is extant. But if we put in the full text of the songs then we are effectively admitting that we cannot recover the play as Shakespeare wrote it – without singing and dancing – but only as it was later adapted by Middleton. Moreover, in order to print the songs we must switch our centre of authority, our guiding principle of what is, and what is not, part of the play. The play as it left the pen of Shakespeare can no longer be our main concern if we are content to publish modern editions whose authority (that is, whose criteria for including or excluding material that has at one time or other been part of *Macbeth*) is the play as it was performed in the 1610s with Middleton's additions.

This chapter will consider the play in its early performances, and with particular attention to how performance choices shape its meaning, bearing in mind its rootedness in a particular time and place and the irony that the earliest 'early performance' we can recover is considerably distant from the first. Our focus will be what the early audiences heard and in particular what they saw, for in this play the appearances of things, and the degree to which we can rely on the appearances of things, are central concerns. In fact we have an eyewitness account of the play being performed in 1611. Simon Forman was a fashionable medical practitioner with connections to the highest elites of London society, and in his notebook he recorded seeing performances of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and a play about King Richard 2.

Forman's description of *Macbeth* begins:

> In Macbeth at the Globe . . . there was to be observed first how Macbeth and Banquo, two noble men of Scotland, riding through a wood, there stood before them three women fairies or nymphs, and saluted Macbeth, saying three times unto

him: 'Hail, Macbeth, king of Codon, for thou shall be a king, but shall beget no kings, etc'.[2]

Notice that he does not call the three women who 'ambush' Macbeth witches, although he perhaps signals their visual indeterminacy by writing 'fairies or nymphs'. This raises the pertinent question of what we are to suppose the witches look like. This is not merely a matter of idle speculation, for theatre practitioners putting on the play today have to decide how the witches will look in their productions, and their primary source of evidence is what other characters say about the witches, as well as how the stage directions (which might be Shakespeare's) describe them and their actions.

THE WITCHES

What, then, do other characters say of the witches? On their second appearance in the play, how they appear is part of the effect of puzzlement they achieve:

Enter Macbeth and Banquo
MACBETH
So foul and fair a day I have not seen.
BANQUO
How far is 't called to Forres? – What are these,
So withered, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth
And yet are on 't? – Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.
MACBETH (*to the Witches*) Speak
(1.3.36–45)

Banquo is bewildered ('What are these'), he sees decayed or elderly ('withered') people, dressed in unusual clothing ('wild in their

attire'), seemingly from somewhere other than 'earth', perhaps not even alive so possibly ghosts (and hence, as in *Hamlet*, to be questioned), looking somewhat like women but with beards. The stage directions call them witches, but as we have seen before this is evidence not available to the playgoer because nobody reads out the stage directions in performance. Only what is said, or what a spectator claims to see, counts as evidence of performance, and Banquo is not certain what he sees.

In fact, the witches are not called witches by anyone in the play, and in the light of that fact we can re-examine Forman's description of them as 'three women fairies or nymphs'. These are approving, not opprobrious, terms: they connote attractiveness, even enticement. It is difficult to reconcile Forman's account with Banquo's words, and perhaps we should simply discount Forman. After all, we could not say that his eyewitness account of 'Macbeth and Banquo . . . riding through a wood' means that the actors at The Globe actually rode horses in this scene, and indeed it is likely that Forman was influenced by his own reading of the source material for this play, which sets this scene in a wood and even depicts it.

There is a kind of teasing in this encounter, and it may explain Forman's use of words (fairies, nymphs) that carry an erotic charge. The tease is in speaking, or rather in withholding speech. The witches seem to put fingers to their lips as if to tell Banquo to stop questioning them, Macbeth himself commands them to speak, and when then have spoken (so enigmatically) they seem to want to slip away: 'MACBETH Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more' (1.3.68). Banquo too implores them to say more, which detail Forman noticed and reports: 'Then said Banquo: "What, all to Macbeth, and nothing to me?" "Yes" said the nymphs, "hail to thee, Banquo, thou shall beget kings, yet be no king." And so they departed . . .'.[3] In Forman's account there is an additional ambiguity: when Banquo refers to the 'all' that Macbeth has received from the nymphs, does he mean all the speech or all the gifts (the titles of Glamis, Cawdor, and king)? This bears upon the wider thematic question of whether the witches are simply telling the future – as Banquo puts it, 'look[ing] into the seeds of time | And say[ing] which grain will grow' (1.3.56–7) – or are they making things happen and so these titles actually are gifts?

In Terry Eagleton's witty reinterpretation of the play, the telling of the future and making things happen are not distinct activities. The articulation of knowledge alters the world, as we all know from the phenomenon of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy', the thing that comes to pass simply because people think it will come to pass. Eagleton comments:

> . . . it is surely clear that positive value in *Macbeth* lies with the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece . . . It is they who, by releasing ambitious thoughts in Macbeth, expose a reverence for hierarchical social order for what it is, as the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare . . . It is their riddling, ambiguous speech (they 'palter with us in a double sense') which promises to subvert this structure . . .[4]

Eagleton's is a joke with a serious point: speaking is a kind of doing, but one with special qualities because it is at once powerful and insubstantial, seemingly inconsequential (just talk) and yet at the heart of what great ones do. Eagleton explores how poststructuralist thinking on marginality and the relation of language to the unconscious illuminates the play. As a Marxist, he also examines how the breaking of rules or bounds (that is, transgression) that the play dramatises is, in Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), what the bourgeoisie are always having to do in reinventing production. There is a self-contradictoriness at the heart of capitalism, according to Eagleton and Marx, for it demands an endless striving to achieve that must outdo and undo itself. This Marx imagined with part of a line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (4.1.150): 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned'. Eagleton comments that '. . . this is the positive trespassing and travestying of the witches, who dissolve into thin air and disfigure all sacred values'.[5]

Let us step back from Eagleton's persuasive reading of Shakespeare's complex explorations of the power of language to ask the prosaic question 'do the witches melt into thin air?' As we have seen, Macbeth in this first encounter commands the witches to 'Stay' and continues talking to them for nine more lines (1.3.68–76)

before '*The Witches Vanish*'. If a sudden disappearance were called for, it is odd that Shakespeare signals this by having them make as to leave, and have to be stayed, well before they finally go: nine lines is nearly half a minute of stage time. In an examination of all the occurrences of this word 'vanish' in plays of the period, Alan Dessen concluded that it does not indicate a stage trick, a disappearing act. Rather, it is part of what the playgoers are to imagine rather than what they actually see: it indicates leaving the stage quickly to avoid being seen.[6]

In the present case, the witches' vanishing is commented upon by Banquo:

> BANQUO
> The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
> And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?
> MACBETH
> Into the air, and what seemed corporal
> Melted as breath into the wind. Would they had stayed.
> BANQUO
> Were such things here as we do speak about,
> Or have we eaten on the insane root
> That takes the reason prisoner?
> (1.3.77–83)

Pertinently for our discussion, Banquo, who was not sure what these women were, is not sure what happened when they left, and entertains the possibility (via a soldier's habitual use of a martial metaphor of capture) that he and Macbeth are out of their minds. Perhaps the audience were not to understand what they had seen either, although if there were a spectacular effect it made no lasting impression on Forman, who simply noted that the witches 'departed'.

Theatre and cinema practitioners are not bound to follow what happened in Shakespeare's time, and in film especially the trick of disappearing before the spectators' eyes is technically simple and dramatically effective. It is curious, then, that in his 1971 film of the play Roman Polanski has the witches simply walk down steps into an underground hovel, watched by Macbeth who nonetheless

reports that they vanished into air, melted into breath.[7] The disjunction between what she sees and Macbeth's description of it invites the filmgoer to consider the gap between words and actions, to think of descriptions as built of language, which is notoriously imperfect in its approximation to reality. Thus Polanski uses this moment of the play to introduce the idea that words are not to be relied upon, or rather that their meanings are not clear and permanent but opaque and contextual. The lesson that speech is not to be relied upon – the lesson of the equivocatory prophecies – comes early in Polanski's version.

I claimed that no-one calls the witches witches in the play, but in fact the word is used once in dialogue when the First Witch explains where she has been and reports that a sailor's wife, refusing her request for food, called out 'Aroint thee, witch' (1.3.5). In his second meeting with the witches, Macbeth calls them 'secret, black, and midnight hags' (4.1.64), and yet even though he has reason to be scornful of them Macbeth does not accuse them of being witches. The word the witches most often use of themselves is 'sisters', suggesting a female solidarity that we rarely find in early-modern culture outside of religious orders. They also once call themselves the weird sisters: 'ALL (*dancing in a ring*) The weird sisters hand in hand, | Posters of the sea and land' (1.3.30–1). This solidarity has been inspirational for feminist critics of Shakespeare, for whom (like Eagleton) the witches are 'no longer the despised demons of critical and theatrical tradition' but rather 'the Weyward sisters' (that is the 1623 Folio's spelling) who 'bring their various skills together' just as the critics do. It is an image 'around which . . . different feminist critiques appropriately constellate'.[8] However, as we shall shortly see, this celebration of 'weywardness' requires something of a misreading.

This single occasion on which the witches call themselves 'weird sisters' occurs just before Macbeth and Banquo enter for the first meeting with them, and yet the expression 'weird sisters' is repeatedly used by Macbeth and Banquo later in the play:

> [LADY MACBETH (*reading*)] Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it came missives from the King, who all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor', by which title before these weird

sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with 'Hail, King that shalt be!' (1.5.5–9)

BANQUO All's well.
I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters.
To you they have showed some truth.
(2.1.18–20)

Enter Banquo
BANQUO
Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all
As the weird women promised; and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for 't.
(3.1.1–3)

[MACBETH] I will tomorrow,
And betimes I will, to the weird sisters.
(3.4.131–2)

The term 'weird' is often explained as meeting Destiny or Fate. As a compound, 'weird sisters' predates Shakespeare's play and was used to mean The Fates, the personification of Destiny, in classical mythology, who had the power to control human affairs.[9] This rather goes beyond what the play seems to deal with: women who know, but do not seem to control, the future. In Old English, *wyrd* meant roughly 'what happens', in the sense not of what has to happen, but rather with the connotation that what comes about has reasons and is shaped by the past. This sense seems more appropriate to the play than ones based on classical mythology.

THE TIMING OF EXITS AND ENTRANCES

What are we to make of Macbeth and Banquo seeming to pick up the phrasing 'weird sisters' used before they entered? We could say that they are simply using the existing phrase (the *OED* has six examples earlier than Shakespeare's play) although it seems peculiar that they should hit on this phrase that the witches themselves

use since, as they keep saying, they do not know what to make of these women. An alternative explanation can be had from a consideration of performance conditions, for which we need to look closely at the timing of the entrance of Macbeth and Banquo when they first meet the witches:

THIRD WITCH
A drum, a drum – Macbeth doth come.
ALL (*dancing in a ring*)
The weird sisters hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about,
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again to make up nine.
Peace! The charm's wound up. *Enter Macbeth and Banquo*
MACBETH
So foul and fair a day I have not seen.
(1.3.28–36)

On the kind of deep-thrust stage at The Globe – like the one in the drawing of The Swan theatre (p. 16) – it would have taken an appreciable time for an actor to walk from the stage door by which he entered to a front-and-centre position from which one may speak. The stage direction that places Macbeth and Banquo's entrance immediately before Macbeth speaks is probably not meant to indicate that he speaks having just emerged onto the stage. Rather, as Mariko Ichikawa has shown, an entrance is a movement that occupies an appreciable amount of time, and hence Macbeth and Banquo might well have begun their entrances several lines before Macbeth speaks.[10] Could Macbeth and Banquo have, as it were, 'overheard' the witches before they fully join them in the onstage action?

In addition to the four occasions already quoted (pp. 186–7 above) on which Macbeth and Banquo call the witches 'weird sisters' there is one further occasion. On this occasion, as with their first vanishing, the exit of the witches is yet again part of their mysteriousness:

Music. The Witches dance, and vanish
MACBETH
Where are they? Gone? Let this pernicious hour

Stand aye accursed in the calendar.
Come in, without there. *Enter Lennox*
LENNOX What's your grace's will?
MACBETH
Saw you the weird sisters?
LENNOX No, my lord.
MACBETH
Came they not by you?
LENNOX No, indeed, my lord.
(4.1.148–53)

The mystery is overtly connected to the choice of doors by which they leave the stage. In most entrances and exits, the choice of doors has no meaning (the actors simply have to leave), but in certain cases it carries special significance. If two characters, or groups of characters, agree to part ('[APOLLO] You that way, we this way. *Exeunt, severally*', *Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.914) then it makes sense for them to go by different doors. Equally, two characters or groups who meet on the stage having coming from different places ('OBERON Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania', *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.60) should enter from different doors. In both situations, the audience is entitled to wonder (as they usually are not) just what happens on the far, unseen side of the stage door. If the splitting parties exit through the same door then the split has to be imagined as occurring off stage, despite the fact that the dialogue indicates that we see it, and equally if the meeting parties enter through the same door we cannot help wondering why they had not already met offstage.

By ordinary logic, when the witches exit after their dance and Lennox is called in by Macbeth in the moment quoted above, we would expect the witches and Lennox to use different doors in order to avoid passing one another. After all, if the witches are to exit unseen it would help to get them off without their crossing Lennox's way. But in the present instance Macbeth is amazed that Lennox did not see the weird sisters pass him as he entered: 'Saw you the weird sisters? . . . Came they not by you?'. There was no chance of Lennox seeing the witches if their exit and his entrance were by different doors, so the two moves were made by the same

door. Whether they passed on stage or off does not matter: either way, Lennox ought to have seen the witches, and that he does not – perhaps the audience even see them walk right by him – enhances the impression of their supernatural power.

We saw that the witches have something in common with ghosts – they seem supernatural, and are to be questioned – and the play has one character who becomes a ghost in the events depicted. Like the 'weird sisters', Banquo's ghost is visible to Macbeth and invisible to others. (A useful point of comparison here is the scene in Gertrude's closet, *Hamlet*, 3.4, in which she claims not to see the ghost of her dead husband as Hamlet points to it.) The scene here is Macbeth's feasting of his loyal thanes:

Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place
MACBETH Sweet remembrancer.
Now good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both.
LENNOX May 't please your highness sit?
MACBETH
Here had we now our country's honour roofed
Were the graced person of our Banquo present,
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance.
ROSS His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please 't your highness
To grace us with your royal company?
MACBETH
The table's full.
LENNOX Here is a place reserved, sir.
MACBETH
Where?
LENNOX
Here, my good lord. What is 't that moves your highness?
MACBETH
Which of you have done this?
LORDS What, my good lord?
MACBETH (*to the Ghost*)
Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake

> Thy gory locks at me.
> ROSS (*rising*)
> Gentlemen, rise. His highness is not well.
> (3.4.36–51)

The image of Banquo taking Macbeth's place is entirely appropriate for the wider action of the play, for what comes to obsess Macbeth is the knowledge that Banquo's children will get the throne of Scotland. He, Macbeth, took Duncan's place but he cannot keep it and will in turn be supplanted. As David Scott Kastan points out, the end of the play leaves this whole matter suspended rather than resolved, since Malcolm is crowned king of Scotland.[11] If Banquo's line – the line of James 6 of Scotland, who is James 1 of England – is to get the throne (as, historically, it did), then the whole sordid action of the play will have to be repeated.

The eyewitness account of the play by Simon Forman gives us a subtly different, perhaps even more interesting, staging of the above movement:

> The next night, being at supper with his noblemen whom he had bid to a feast, to the which also Banquo should have come, he began to speak of noble Banquo, and to wish that he were there. And as he thus did, standing up to drink a carouse to him, the ghost of Banquo came and sat down in his chair behind him; and he, turning about to sit down again, saw the ghost of Banquo, which fronted [i.e. affronted] him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, uttering many words about his murder by which, when they heard that Banquo was murdered, they suspected Macbeth.[12]

Like the witches, Banquo in both versions is unseen. But Forman has him sneak into Macbeth's own seat when Macbeth stands up. The comic action of taking Macbeth's seat behind his back makes the ghost's ability to go unseen until a key moment of recognition be a matter of stealth, and since Macbeth cannot sit down again (because Banquo is in his seat) the audience gets a sense not only that Banquo will (via his children) replace Macbeth, but that Banquo and Macbeth are as one person. It is as though Macbeth

were confronting himself as a reproachful ghost, and thus the more violence he directs outwards onto others the more he hurts himself.

In the script as we have it, the ghost leaves and Macbeth regains his composure only for the ghost to enter again as Macbeth is toasting the absent Banquo (3.4.87–9). This, rather than the above moment, might be what Forman recalled, for it fits the irony that Macbeth's toast is supposed to commemorate one whom he says is missed, but whose absence (because he is dead) is the achievement that Macbeth really means to celebrate. The ghost will not allow this celebration, will not allow Banquo to be absent at the feast even though dead. The natural order of things is disrupted, and in the midst of the horror appears the comedy of the ghost slipping into Macbeth's seat when he stands up, and the comic horror of Macbeth's incredulous lament 'The time has been | That, when the brains were out, the man would die, | And there an end' (3.4.77–9). The disruption in the universal cosmic order is echoed in the disruption of the earthly, social order. In her hurry to get the thanes out before Macbeth suffers another breakdown, Lady Macbeth instructs them not to follow the usual rules about who walks ahead of whom according to their relative social ranks: 'Stand not upon the order of your going, | But go at once' (3.4.118–19).

THE BIPOLAR STAGE

The principle that a door may, at times, be more than a way on and off the stage – that it may represent the way to a known place – is at one crucial moment strongly evoked. Near the end of scene 2.2, Macbeth has done the murder of Duncan but forgotten to leave the daggers with the body, so Lady Macbeth takes them from him to put them in Duncan's bedchamber, by the body:

> [LADY MACBETH]
> Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed
> I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
> For it must seem their guilt. *Exit. Knock within*

MACBETH Whence is that knocking? –
(2.2.50–5)

There is an offstage horror that Macbeth cannot bring himself to look at, and what is more the audience knows where to imagine it lies since Lady Macbeth exits to put the daggers there. So, whichever stage door she uses to leave and do this deed, that door is unmistakably signalled as the way to Duncan's bedchamber.

She returns almost immediately (so the body is not far behind that door) and says that they had better get into their nightclothes, for if the knocking 'At the south entry' (2.2.64) wakes the whole household, he and she ought not to be found up and fully dressed. The Macbeths exit at the end of the scene, and we can be sure that whatever door they use, it is not the one behind which the audience are supposed to imagine the body of Duncan lying. The next scene begins with the entrance of the Porter who guards the entrance to the castle at which the knocking has taken place. As the actor playing the Porter has first to enter before he can play the scene, he must use one of the stage doors. Presumably it will not be the one behind which the audience still thinks the body of Duncan is lying. There are only two doors onto the stage in the De Witt drawing of The Swan (see p. 16), so let us see how this scene might be managed with only two doors.

If one of the doors is identified in the playgoers' minds as the door to Duncan's bedchamber, and there are only two doors, the other door must be used for all entrances and exits that do not involve Duncan's bedchamber. Thus the Porter enters through this 'free' door, and immediately has to pretend that the door he came in through is the one that he is guarding and at which visitors to the castle are knocking. This creates a problem, but perhaps the actor could get away with it. (We might even think the comic patter he speaks while most pointedly not answering the door is supposed to distract the audience from this staging problem.) If this 'free' door is, however, identified as the castle entrance seen from the inside of the castle, there is an even greater problem ahead. Not only do Macduff and Lennox have to be admitted through it when their knocking has become intolerable (2.3.20) but twenty lines later Macbeth also has to enter, apparently awakened by their incessant

knocking. With only two doors, one of which is supposed to be the door to Duncan's bedchamber and the other the entrance to the castle, Macbeth's entrance is going to seem odd: he is supposed to have been sleeping, so he should not come in from Duncan's bedchamber nor from outside the castle.

We might argue that this proves that there are more than two doors onto the stage, and hence that the De Witt drawing is unreliable and there must be at least one more opening. Tim Fitzpatrick argues this evidence the other way, and suggests that the entire Porter's scene was written to solve the practical problem of staging these events on a two-door stage:

> The function of the intervening Porter's scene would thus be simply to provide psychological breathing-space to enable the door to be wiped and reset: it is only after the Porter's twenty lines of monologue that he finally opens the door which has in the meantime swapped signification – it can now stand for 'the south entry', an external door that needs a Porter with keys to open it. And then, after another twenty lines of small talk with Macduff, the door can be wiped and reset again, to signify once more the door leading to Macbeth's apartments . . .[13]

An alternative possibility is that, contrary to our initial premise, the Porter actually enters in this scene through the door behind which Duncan is supposed to be lying dead. This seems extraordinary, but Fitzpatrick points out that it would entertainingly surprise the audience. When the Macbeths exit, having left the incriminatory daggers with the body, Macbeth's final line is 'Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst. *Exeunt*' (2.2.72). If at this point the door to Duncan's bedchamber opens and a figure unsteady on this feet (the Porter is, of course, drunk) shambles in, might not the audience think that the knocking has indeed awakened Duncan, who was only wounded not killed in Macbeth's murderous assault? In performance, the parts of Duncan and the Porter are often doubled, which would enhance this brief moment of cognitive dissonance, which is resolved once the actor begins speaking.

Fitzpatrick developed his model of a two-door stage, and noticed that the pattern of one door leading further inwards (to Duncan's

bedchamber, or to the Macbeths' rooms) and one door leading further outwards (to the wider world beyond the castle) is repeated in many scenes in other plays. In general, he concludes, the stage often represents an intermediate space with doors leading in two directions, one more enclosed, private, intimate, and domestic (so into, or further into, a house) and the other more open, public, impersonal, and worldly (so, out of the house, down to the harbour, off to the next town or to sea). It is remarkable how often in the drama Fitzpatrick's simple binary structure correctly characterises what we are supposed to make of the space represented on the stage and the two routes leading away from it. As he pointed out, since in this period the domestic is almost exclusively associated with the feminine, and the public sphere with the masculine, this makes the doors carry a gendered charge. This convention would allow characters who transgress their allotted gender roles such as Rosalind and Celia in *As You Like It* to show their emergence into the wider, masculine world by exiting through the 'wrong' door, the one normally taken by men going out.

Although Macbeth piles further crimes onto the murder of Duncan, this is the initiating act, the primal rebellion, that drives the remainder of the play. In the light of what was said about Shakespeare's serial history plays in Chapter 2, you may want to think of this tragedy as a kind of compressed version of the tetralogies: the punishment comes at the end of the play for the usurpation at the beginning of the play. As with the first tetralogy, there is a thirst for knowledge of the future and recourse to supernatural means to get it. Although it strains the credibility of the plot somewhat – how did he know where to find them? – Macbeth returns to the weird sisters to 'to know | By the worst means the worst' (3.4.133–4). Unlike the earlier meeting, this one catches them in flagrantly witch-like behaviour, around a cauldron into which they hurl noxious matter.

THE APPARITIONS

It seems clear that the weird sisters are in this scene attempting to conjure spirits, and for comparison it is worth looking at

Shakespeare's only other conjuring scene. In *2 Henry 6* Margery Jordan a witch, Sir John Hume, John Southwell, two priests, Roger Bolingbroke a conjuror, and Eleanor the Duchess of Gloucester conjure a spirit, Asnath, who '*rises*' (presumably from the stage trap) and seemingly reluctantly: 'Ask what thou wilt, that I had said and done' (1.4.29). Asnath is clearly compelled to answer, suffers because of it, and wants to return from whence he came.

The first of the so-called 'apparitions' summoned by the weird sisters in *Macbeth* is likewise apparently suffering painful compulsion to appear:

> *Thunder. First Apparition: an armed head*
> MACBETH
> Tell me, thou unknown power –
> FIRST WITCH He knows thy thought.
> Hear his speech, but say thou naught.
> FIRST APPARITION
> Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff,
> Beware the Thane of Fife. Dismiss me. Enough.
> *Apparition descends*
> (4.1.84–8)

There is little point pursuing just what the dramatist or performers had in mind for 'an armed head' – readers and practitioners are entitled to indulge their imaginations here – but it is clear that the head is under the witches' control: its 'Dismiss me. Enough' is a clear plea to be released. Most strangely, the witches call the apparitition they raise 'our masters' (4.1.79), yet the apparitions are under their control.

Why this disavowal of power by the witches? Perhaps the apparitions are also part of Middleton's reworking of the play after Shakespeare's death and in the original the witches were subservient to the spirits they summoned. However, given the parallels with Shakespeare's other conjuring scene in which the spirit is reluctantly compelled to appear, not powerfully commanding, this seems unlikely. Presumably, then, this is one more deception of Macbeth and the witches' wanting to seem powerless should alert our suspicions to precisely the degree it allays Macbeth's. Tricking

Macbeth into taking the servants, the spirits, for the masters seems to make him place even greater faith in their pronouncements than might otherwise be the case.

Certainly, by the rising of the second apparition, Macbeth is entirely credulous:

> FIRST WITCH
> He will not be commanded. Here's another,
> More potent than the first
> *Thunder. Second Apparition: a bloody child*
> SECOND APPARITION
> Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth.
> MACBETH Had I three ears I'd hear thee.
> SECOND APPARITION
> Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth. *Apparition descends*
> (4.1.91–7)

As well as the marvellous comic image of Macbeth's three ears for three hailings, this apparition develops a strain of exquisite irony in Macbeth's responses to what are, after all, only theatrical tricks. What kind of assurance can Macbeth get about babies not born 'of woman' from a baby that rises, seemingly magically, and has the power of speech?

This ironic strain is developed even more clearly in the penultimate vision, containing a glaring visual clue that ought to help Macbeth solve what are clearly presented as puzzles:

> *Thunder. Third Apparition: a child crowned, with a tree in his hand*
> [MACBETH] What is this
> That rises like the issue of a king,
> And wears upon his baby-brow the round
> And top of sovereignty?
> ALL THE WITCHES Listen, but speak not to 't.
> THIRD APPARITION
> Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care

Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are.
Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him. *Apparition descends*
(4.1.102–10)

Those who know the story will recognise 'the issue of a king' as Malcolm, son of Duncan, who will bring about this apparent miracle. But even those who do not know what is coming ought to notice that a child with 'a tree in his hand' is a hint that boughs can be cut down and carried away, and that the apparent miracle is an illusion not hard to achieve.

The performative focus of the apparitions presented so far has been the cauldron, and bearing in mind the facilities of the early-modern theatre it seems likely that the apparitions rose from and descended into a cauldron that was placed over the centrally-located trap door of the theatre stage. With a hole in the bottom of the cauldron the apparitions could be thrust up (if they are properties) or enter (if they are actors) from the space underneath the stage. There was a marked theatrical association of the understage area and the supernatural, and not only devils but also strange noises could emerge from there, such as the ghost's crying of the word 'Swear' in *Hamlet* (1.5.151, 157). In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* the soldiers on guard before the central battle are spooked when '*Music of the hautboys is under the stage*' (4.3.10) and they take it as an omen of doom, a sign of the abandonment of their leader by the supernatural forces that have aided him: 'the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, | Now leaves him' (4.3.14–15).

The same abandonment is shown, and with strikingly similar means, in the last of the shows that the witches put on for Macbeth:

ALL THE WITCHES Seek to know no more.
MACBETH I will be satisfied. Deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know.
The cauldron sinks. Hautboys
Why sinks that cauldron? And what noise is this?
FIRST WITCH Show.
SECOND WITCH Show.

> THIRD WITCH Show.
> ALL THE WITCHES Show his eyes and grieve his heart,
> Come like shadows, so depart. *A show of eight kings, the last with a glass in his hand; and Banquo*
> (4.1.119–27)

That the sinking cauldron descends into the space under the stage seems to indicate that the final show does not use it, and the obvious way to present the eight kings is to have them parade over the stage, entering by one stage door and leaving by the other. Thus unlike the previous shows, which may have used only stage properties to represent an armed head, a bloody baby, and a child, this one seems to demand that actors represent the kings. One of the early-modern words for an actor was 'shadow', and the witches invoke this term in describing the show. (It is a salutary reminder of the differences between their notions of the importance of actors and ours that they spoke of 'shadows' where we speak of 'stars'.)

The final show, then, invokes not a localised manifestation of the supernatural or a localised 'theatrical' deception (as if the witches are only clever tricksters) centred on the cauldron, but a much larger event: the means have been inflated to encompass the whole theatre and to involve the actors who are putting on *Macbeth* for an audience. This would seem to suggest an analogy between what the witches do and what actors do: they put on shows. We will pursue this analogy in the next chapter where we consider its greatest articulation in the various theatrical 'shows' put on by Prospero for his friends and enemies in *The Tempest*.

INDETERMINACY

For now we should note that this suggestion that the witches are presenters of deceptive shows that are like the wider deceptive show, the play *Macbeth* considered in its entirety, leaves their true status undetermined. Are they really witches? We have seen throughout this book that a script is fundamentally indeterminate in that its meanings are not completed until someone makes the hundreds of choices that are necessary to turn a text into a

performance. But here we see that even once these choices are made, indeterminacies remain. Sometimes it is entirely the point of performance to leave open and unanswered some of the fundamental questions that audiences and readers might bring to a play.

When Macbeth describes how he found the body of murdered Duncan, Lady Macbeth responds in a way that is inherently indeterminate:

> [MACBETH] Here lay Duncan,
> His silver skin laced with his golden blood
> . . .
> LADY MACBETH Help me hence, ho!
> MACDUFF
> Look to the lady.
> MALCOLM (*aside to Donalbain*) Why do we hold our tongues
> . . .
> Upon the foot of motion.
> BANQUO Look to the lady
> *Exit Lady Macbeth, attended*
> (2.3.111–24)

Lady Macbeth's cry for help and the repeated call for someone to help her suggest that she faints. At this point in the action it would be a useful 'cover' for her complicity in the murder for her to faint at the description of the discovery of the body, for this would suggest that she is too delicate to be involved in the act. Some editors have inserted at this point a stage direction to indicate either that she really faints or that (seeing how useful this would be in suggesting her innocence) she pretends to faint. On reflection this is a meaningless distinction. A stage direction tells an actor what she should pretend to do, and (leaving aside the possibility of an implausible pretence apt to provoke laughter) pretending to faint and pretending to pretend to faint are identical acts.

It is the same with the weird sisters: we cannot positively say whether they are witches or no, for this is a question that the play does not unequivocally answer. The play equivocates on this point just as the weird sisters and the apparitions they summon equivocate

to Macbeth. To modify what was claimed earlier, then, we may say that performance reduces the indeterminacy in the script, but not necessarily down to a singularity: there remain unanswered, unanswerable questions. This is true of language also: not only the equivocations of the witches and their apparitions, but also the sayings of the good king Duncan yield double meaning.

Considering the deceptive rebellion of the old Thane of Cawdor, Duncan comments that 'There's no art | To find the mind's construction in the face' (1.4.11–12). Does he mean it is so easy to read the mind by looking at the face that it cannot be called an art? Or does he mean that it is so difficult to do this that no art can manage it? It is impossible to tell, but the question surely re-emerges at the close of the play when the next Thane of Cawdor's head (or, presumably, the property that stands for it) is carried in by Macduff. Holding the head, Macduff tells the assembled successful usurpers (for have they not just supplanted a king?) to look at it: 'Behold where stands | Th' usurper's cursed head' (5.11.20–1). Might not some of them look the wrong way?

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Like *Measure for Measure*, the only version of *Macbeth* we have was one adapted by Middleton after Shakespeare finished with it.
- We have additional evidence from Simon Forman's eyewitness account of the play in performance in 1611.
- The women called witches are deliberately of an ambiguous nature, and critics from Marxist and feminist schools have found positive value in them for their resistance to the ultra-violent masculinist world of the Scottish aristocracy.
- By close study of the timing of exits and entrances, and the use of particular stage doors to represent different offstage locations, we can construct readings of the play in which the practical dramaturgical concerns reinforce insights derived from thematic and characterological approaches.
- It is arguable that what the witches present to Macbeth are purely theatrical shows, in which case the entire performances

take on something of the ontological uncertainty of the witches and their apparent prophecies.

NOTES

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2. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 235.
3. Ibid., p. 235.
4. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 2.
5. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
6. Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 196–215.
7. Roman Polanski, dir. *Macbeth*, Caliban Films/Playboy Productions, 1971.
8. Dympna Callaghan, Lorraine Helms, and Jyotsna Singh (eds), *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 1.
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13. Tim Fitzpatrick, 'Shakespeare's Exploitation of a Two-door Stage: *Macbeth*', *Theatre Research International*, 20 (1995), 207–30, esp. 211.

CHAPTER 7

Identities: *The Tempest*

At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero says of Caliban 'This thing of darkness I | Acknowledge mine' (5.1.278–9). This might be taken as an admission that his slave is not merely his possession but has become, or perhaps always was, a part of himself. What does it mean for Prospero to connect himself to Caliban in this way? The relationships between characters in the play have been mapped by some critics onto the relations between colonisers and colonised in the early days of the British Empire. In this light Prospero would seem to acknowledge a connection of colonial mastery with Caliban, and it is a relation not merely of ownership but also of duty, for Prospero's famous statement is actually the completion of a dividing-up of responsibility with Antonio: 'Two of these fellows you | Must know and own. This thing of darkness I | Acknowledge mine' (5.1.577–9). If this is a colonial relation, it seems to include the idea that the coloniser is in a sense responsible for the natives, which is the so-called principle of the White Man's Burden.

'The White Man's Burden' is the title of a poem by Rudyard Kipling written in 1899 about the American government's colonial project in the Philippines, and it begins:

> Take up the White Man's burden –
> Send forth the best ye breed –
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need;

To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.[1]

Critics are not agreed whether Kipling meant this poem straightforwardly as a call for the advanced industrial nations to take up their responsibilities towards undeveloped nations by benevolent colonisation of them, or whether he was mocking such patronising and paternalistic attitudes towards what we now think of as the victims of European and American imperialism. Either way, what should strike us most strongly is Kipling's capturing of the colonial masters' conviction that the colonised are sullen, devilish, and childlike.

THE IDENTITY OF CALIBAN

Caliban is described in exactly these terms, first by Prospero: 'Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself | Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!' (1.2.321–2). Kipling's sense of the half-and-half composite person ('Half devil and half child') is clear also in Trinculo's first response to seeing Caliban, who is hiding under a gaberdine:

> [TRINCULO] (*Seeing Caliban*) What have we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive? – A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms! Warm, o' my troth! I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer. This is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. (2.2.24–36)

From Trinculo's description it would seem that the actor playing Caliban is costumed to look like a composite being, part man and part fish. Trinculo's hope that he might display this 'beast' for profit in England mirrors sixteenth-century practice: Indians from newly-discovered America were abducted or enticed to Europe for public exhibition, and even when neglected or abused to death they generated profit for their owners.

The idea of composite identity is taken further when Trinculo joins Caliban under the gaberdine and the two of them together are mistaken for a strange native of the island by drunken Stefano:

> STEFANO What's the matter? Have we devils here? Do
> you put tricks upon 's with savages and men of Ind,
> ha? I have not scaped drowning to be afeard now of
> your four legs . . .
> This is some monster of the isle with four legs,
> who hath got, as I take it, an ague.
> (2.2.57–66)

Once Trinculo and Caliban are separated, the two Europeans assume mastery of Caliban, whom they five times call 'moon calf' (2.2.105, 109, 135 and 3.2.21, 25). A moon-calf was 'An abortive shapeless fleshy mass in the womb; a false conception' (*OED* moon-calf 1. a), so again we have evidence that in performance Caliban was supposed to look only partly human.

What should Caliban look like, then, and is he essentially human? Prospero says that Caliban's mother was the witch Sycorax and his father the devil (1.2.321–2) and Caliban certainly agrees that Sycorax was his mother ('Sycorax my mother' 1.2.333) and he seems to accept that she had magical powers ('All the charms | Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you', 1.2.341–2). But Caliban says nothing of who his father was, and of course it is in the nature of human sexual reproduction that motherhood is certain while fatherhood is a matter of trust.

Childlike Caliban, then, has a known mother and an unknown (but suspectedly diabolical) father. As we saw above, Trinculo calls Caliban fishy (and seems to mean it literally) and repeats it later: 'Why, thou debauched fish, thou . . . being but half a fish and half

a monster?' (3.2.26–9). Antonio seems to agree and even repeats Trinculo's point about the profitability of displaying such creatures to a fee-paying public: 'a plain fish, and no doubt marketable' (5.1.269). Finally, there is Caliban's childlike behaviour, which Trinculo describes as canine:

> CALIBAN (*to Stefano*)
> I'll kiss thy foot. I'll swear myself thy subject.
> STEFANO Come on then; down, and swear. [*Caliban kneels*]
> TRINCULO I shall laugh myself to death at this puppy-headed monster. A most scurvy monster! (2.2.151–4)

This might mean that Caliban actually has a head that looks a bit like a dog's, or it might only mean that he fawns on his master like a dog.

It seems clear that Caliban is some kind of monster, and this word 'monster' is used about him forty-four times in the play. However, when evaluating descriptions given by characters in plays, one always has to bear in mind just who is giving the description. Noticeably, every one of those uses of the word 'monster' is in the mouth of either Trinculo or Stefano: no-one else ever calls Caliban this. Could it be that he only seems so to them, and that to others he seems much more like a man? It is a recurrent theme of this play that perception is a subjective matter and that things may seem one way to one person and quite the opposite to others who are present and looking from a different angle, thus:

> GONZALO (*to Adrian*) Here is everything advantageous to life.
> ANTONIO (*to Sebastian*) True, save means to live.
> SEBASTIAN Of that there's none, or little.
> GONZALO (*to Adrian*) How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!
> ANTONIO The ground indeed is tawny.
> (2.1.53–9)

Looking around them, optimists see beauty and foison and cynics see ugliness and desert. Reading the play and imagining the scene in one's mind, this can be taken as a simple illustration of subjective

perception. Of course, when staging or filming the play, directors and designers who put around the actors some version of the landscape of the island have to decide whether Gonzalo or Antonio and Sebastian are essentially right because they have to create a set that is green or brown, lush or bare. Alternatively, in the theatre at least, they might emulate early-modern theatre practice and keep the wooden stage unadorned – so that the landscape is to be imagined by the playgoer – and thus neither validate nor contradict either point of view.

Should we apply such a subjective principle to the appearance of Caliban? It seems difficult to say we can, since unlike the stage the actors have to be clothed in something and even if he were naked – which is not how we think Jacobean actors ever appeared – a human actor playing Caliban would connote humanity, not monstrosity. There is, however, a sliver of evidence that Caliban's appearance and status are somewhat in the realm of the subjective. Miranda seems to change her mind about whether Caliban is a man according to whom she is talking with:

> MIRANDA (*aside*)
> Why speaks my father so ungently? This
> Is the third man that e'er I saw, the first
> That e'er I sighed for. Pity move my father
> To be inclined my way.
> (1.2.447–50)

Miranda is commenting on Prospero's behaviour towards Ferdinand, with whom she has fallen in love, and Ferdinand would be 'the third man' she has seen only if Prospero and Caliban are the first two. Since the comment is made in an aside to the audience (or to herself), and characters never lie in such asides, she must really mean this: Caliban is a man. On the other hand, when talking openly to Ferdinand, she drops Caliban from the count of men:

> MIRANDA I do not know
> One of my sex, no woman's face remember
> Save from my glass mine own; nor have I seen
> More that I may call men than you, good friend,

And my dear father.
(3.1.48–52)

Strangely enough, Prospero does not count himself as one of the men Miranda has seen, but includes Caliban: 'Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he, | Having seen but him and Caliban (1.2.481–2).

This raises the possibility of Caliban as a sexual partner for Miranda, for if he is human it would be possible for them to populate the island. The possibility occurred to Caliban before the start of the play:

[PROSPERO] I have used thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.
CALIBAN
O ho, O ho! Would 't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.
MIRANDA Abhorrèd slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill!
(1.2.347–55)

Noticeably, would-be rapist Caliban thinks of sexual reproduction not as a blending of two bloodlines but as an almost mechanical replication of himself. This necessarily loses him audience sympathy, but we should remember that at some, perhaps not even conscious, level, Miranda has acknowledged Caliban as a potential sexual partner, albeit perhaps one who forces himself on her. All this makes Caliban liminally human.

NATURE/NURTURE

That Caliban somehow marks the borderline case of humanity puts him squarely within the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates

about the nature of 'savages', those people the explorers and early colonists came into contact with in the New World. We shall explore shortly whether there is a thoroughgoing New World context that we may apply to *The Tempest*, but first we should continue with the agreed-upon pre-history of Prospero and Miranda's encounter with Caliban. The Italians claim to have tried to give him the benefit of their civilisation, with Miranda taking particular responsibility for Caliban's education:

> [MIRANDA] I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
> With words that made them known.
> (1.2.355–60)

Caliban has already conceded this point and makes distinction between the loving care they took of him when they first arrived and the meanness of their current treatment:

> [CALIBAN] When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
> Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
> And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile –
> Cursed be I that did so! . . .
> . . . here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' th' island.
> (1.2.334–46)

For Caliban, it seems that knowing the names of the sun and moon (the bigger and less lights) was a benefit, as was receiving (but not, it seems, learning how to prepare) water sweetened with berries.

The Italians brought culture and in return Caliban gave them the island's natural resources.

The event that Caliban passes over in silence, the event that changed Prospero and Miranda's behaviour towards him, is his attempted rape of Miranda, in punishment for which his movement is severely curtailed. Miranda only alludes to it, but thinks the punishment fitting:

> [MIRANDA] But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in 't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
> Deservedly confined into this rock,
> Who hadst deserved more than a prison.
> CALIBAN
> You taught me language, and my profit on 't
> Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language!
> (1.2.360–7)

So, the language that was a blessing when Caliban had pleasures to put into words is no longer a blessing now that all he has to put into words is his misery.

Prospero repeatedly threatens punishment for Caliban's cursing: 'tonight thou shalt have cramps', 'Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up', 'Thou shalt be pinched', 'I'll rack thee with old cramps', and '[I'll] Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar' (1.2.327–30, 371–2). We can be sure that Caliban has suffered these punishments for cursing before, and he takes Prospero's threats seriously. Even when Prospero is not around to hear him Caliban assumes that cursing is monitored and corrected, and he lives in a state of perpetual fear of further punishment:

> CALIBAN [*throwing down his burden*]
> All the infections that the sun sucks up
> From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall, and make him
> By inch-meal a disease! [*A noise of thunder heard*] His spirits hear me,
> And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,

Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i' th' mire,
Nor lead me like a fire-brand in the dark
Out of my way, unless he bid 'em.
(2.2.1–7)

Caliban has internalised the system of punishment administered to him and is so cowed that he takes natural events such as the sound of thunder for the workings of the penal system that accompanies the linguistic system brought to the island by Prospero and Miranda.

And yet the system fails and Caliban 'needs must curse'. Is this because he simply is incapable of learning? Prospero certainly thinks so, calling him:

PROSPERO
A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost,
And, as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers.
(4.1.188–92)

This goes to the heart of Caliban's identity: he is not simply uncivilised but also, more miserably, uncivilisable. This would seem to place him outside the human, for although we still do not know just what proportion of human personality and behaviour is our innate, genetically encoded nature and how much is learnt as an infant, it is generally agreed that both forces are at work and to differing degrees according to which behaviour we are concerned with.

Caliban, according to Prospero, is all nature and cannot learn. The nature/nurture dichotomy that this anticipates was hotly debated in the late seventeenth century, with the British Empiricist philosopher John Locke famously declaring in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) that when we are born the mind is essentially empty, like 'white paper, void of all characters'.[2] This 'tabula rasa' (or blank slate) model of the human mind has only recently been disproved for certain key aspects of behaviour and

ability such as the language faculty and the power broadly to infer others' states of mind by their behaviour, which are now known to be biologically innate.[3] It is worth noting that Locke's model would tend to level out the differences between people: if we are all entirely made by our experiences (sometimes called the 'social constructivist' model of humanity) then Caliban, and natives like him, are not inherently, essentially inferior to the Europeans who rule them. Prospero is no Lockean, and for him Caliban has turned out to be inherently, essentially inferior. We might even say that the experiment of trying to educate Caliban, which failed (it did not civilise him out of his base sexual lust and propensity for rape), shows Shakespeare anticipating the philosophical debates of the later seventeenth century and shows that he took the anti-empiricist line. However, as we shall see it is not clear that Prospero really thinks Caliban beyond improvement.

THE NEW WORLD

In Shakespeare's time the philosophical debates about nature/nurture had not reached the explicit sophistication to be found in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But such questions about human nature were being routinely encountered by those engaged in New World exploration. Europeans who met American Indians found languages, social structures, and cultural practices unlike anything they were familiar with, and it was for many a baffling yet exciting experience. An essay that popularised the idea that *The Tempest* is covertly concerned with New World colonisation was Paul Brown's '"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine": *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism' (1985).[4] Brown sees the play not merely as a 'reflection of colonialist practices' but as an 'intervention in a contradictory and even ambivalent discourse' in the form of a narrative which 'seeks at once to harmonize disjunction, to transcend irreconcilable contradictions and to mystify the political conditions which demand colonialist discourse'. This goal is not achieved by the play and it inadvertantly foregrounds what it tries to efface.[5]

The Tempest, Brown argues, begins with a disruption (a tempest) that is created precisely to make problems and then resolve them, which is something of a paradox, as is the would-be colonist binding slaves to him with gifts. Ariel was freed from the tree and will be freed again (completely) if he complies with Prospero's commands. But this largesse is underwritten by violence and the threat of re-incarceration if he disobeys.[6] As we have seen, Caliban is trapped by his acquisition of the language of the colonist, he can only speak well and so display acceptance of the codes of courtly behaviour, or else curse and reinforce the demonising of himself. Caliban does, however, develop 'discursive strategies' to resist this process, as in his cursing of the aristocratic shipwrecks, which causes them to curse him, so 'reducing the eloquent master of civil language to the raucous registers of the other'.[7]

For Brown, Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda is the threat of rebellious natives to take the land for themselves because they do not recognise the boundaries placed by the colonist, and thus the colonialist enterprise becomes a struggle between rapist, virgin, and the virgin's protector.[8] In the play, power and its role in colonialism are presented in the guises of musical harmony and romance; this Brown calls the 'euphemisation, the effacement of power'. Caliban's mistaking the drunken servant Stefano for a powerful man, and his forming of an alliance with him, is a re-enactment of the process of colonising which happened when Caliban first met Prospero, but this time it is in a low register, and funny because of the misrecognition. Just as Miranda and Ferdinand recognise a 'common courtly bond', so Caliban and Stefano have a 'spontaneous non-civil affinity'.[9] Caliban's dream of music is not the antithesis of colonial discourse, but its apotheosis. The desire in the dream is for release rather than for control, and his is the 'radical ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse': the powerless desire powerlessness which is expressed as a good. Thus Brown brought in Freud's theories to explain the play in terms of dreamwork, in which the contradiction between latent drive and censorship is smoothed out and the expression shifted so that it gets passed the mind's censor.[10]

Looked at this way, the dialectic process of Prospero's plan succeeds as it simultaneously divests him of power: he loses control over his daughter and finally he abjures his magic altogether. The

power of magic is not replaced by civil power, since Prospero goes back to the world to retire rather than to resume his previous office. Thus the threat of Caliban's revolt is necessary to Prospero in order for Prospero to assert his power to win the struggle with it; colonialist discourse needs an 'other' to overcome, and constantly remakes this 'other'. Thus the struggle is endless whereas plays are not, and this is why Gonzalo has to announce the end of the narrative. The Caliban/Prospero struggle is endless because they are dialectically united, which is what Prospero admits when he says 'this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine'. The play, then, is ultimately ambivalent and not triumphalist about colonialism.[11]

Brown's is a persuasive and inventive reading, but it suffers from the fundamental weakness that nothing in the play overtly suggests a connection with, or relevance to, the New World. The fleet of ships that Prospero ambushes is returning to Italy from Tunis on the north African coast (2.1.73–102), crossing the Mediterranean, for which the most direct route is the Tyrrhenian Sea and even the most indirect route would never take one out of Europe. It is true that Ariel mentions Bermuda, which certainly is in the New World and indeed was the site of a shipwreck that provided a source for the play,[12] but he mentions it not as being anywhere nearby but as an example of the distant land to which he is routinely sent on errands: 'Thou called'st me up at midnight to fetch dew | From the still-vexed Bermudas' (1.2.229–30). Although it is hard to believe that many in the original audiences would have noticed it, the name of Sycorax's god Setebos (mentioned by Caliban at 1.2.375 and 5.1.264) was the name of a god worshipped by the Patagonians, which, being at the southern tip of South America, is in the New World. On the other hand, there is no suggestion that Sycorax is from Patagonia, so one might also think that Shakespeare was teasing us with hints at a New World, and hence colonial, context that he will not substantiate.

There is one way to link a story about getting lost in the Mediterranean with the New World explorations, and it makes a virtue of this awkward fact that these worlds are so far apart. The reason that the native inhabitants of the New World came to be called Indians was that Christopher Columbus had vastly miscalculated the size of the Earth and upon arriving at the Caribbean islands he thought he had reached what Europeans called the

Indies, now known as the Malay Archipelago between Indochina and Australia. Columbus soon realised that he was on a large and hitherto unknown continent, but the names 'West Indies' and 'Indians' stuck. The Italian fleet of King Alonso of Naples would have to be vastly off-course to arrive in the New World by mistake, or would have to be blown a vast distance in the play's opening storm, but might not that impossible vastness suit the theme of a New World play, since the New World itself was discovered by a sailor far off-course and acquired its spurious name from somewhere else halfway around the world?

COLONIALISM IN GENERAL

We might in any case wish to pursue the idea that *The Tempest* is about colonialism even if there were no obvious New World connection. After all, Ireland was colonised by Britain in the sixteenth century (after a half-hearted attempt in the twelfth century), and the important points of interest are not geographical but political: who governs, how they govern, how is production organised (are the natives enslaved or displaced), and how might a fictional narrative engage with these processes in its telling of a story? This was the approach taken by Francis Barker and Peter Hulme in their essay 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Contexts of *The Tempest*' (1985).[13] As Barker and Hulme point out, to make Caliban the centre of *The Tempest* but only as a model of the nature/art confrontation – as I have been doing – is to occlude his political claim to ownership of the island. Such occlusion has been the work of literary criticism for many years.[14]

According to Barker and Hulme, the key moment that criticism has failed to explain is the disruption that ends the masque that Prospero puts on for the delight of Miranda and Ferdinand. English colonialism is characterised by Barker and Hulme as an 'ensemble of fictional and lived practices' that are the dominant discursive context for *The Tempest*, and the central practice is usurpation. The four usurpations in the play – Antonio of Prospero, Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, Antonio and Sebastian's attempt against Alonso, and Caliban's attempt with Trinculo and

Stefano against Prospero – are 'figural traces of the text's anxiety concerning the very matters of domination and resistance'.[15]

Prospero's exposition to Miranda in the first act of the prehistory of the play (the story of his usurpation and their arrival on the island) is a version of history challenged by Ariel and Caliban who have their own readings of the significance of the events. In these matters, criticism has generally taken Prospero's voice as authoritative (and authorial in his role as quasi-playwright) despite the play's resistance to this, for the play provides its own contestation of his voice. Caliban actually complains that he was usurped by Prospero: 'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, | Which thou tak'st from me' (1.2.333–4). It is worth considering this claim for a moment. Caliban asserts a right of inheritance, a succession by lineal descent, which might seem a powerful argument if, in the light of the above comments about his physical nature, we take him to be a native of the island who is merely non-European in appearance. On the other hand, Caliban's claim is weak since he was born on the island only because his mother, pregnant with him, was banished from her native home Algiers and brought to the island as an exile to be punished (1.2.262–71). That is to say, the line of Sycorax has no deep roots on the island either, so Caliban is almost as much of a new arrival as his competitor Prospero.

Prospero does not answer Caliban's claim to have been usurped but Barker and Hulme thought that he is clearly rattled and accuses Caliban of lying and then adds that Caliban attempted to rape Miranda; this last being his own justification for the arbitrary rule he exercises. What Barker and Hulme consider to be the usurpation and enslavement of Caliban is passed over silently despite the play's general concern over matters of legitimacy. 'Prospero's disavowal [of Caliban's claim]', they write, 'is itself performative of the discourse of colonialism, since this particular reticulation of denial of dispossession with retrospective justification for it, is the characteristic trope by which European colonial regimes articulated their authority over land to which they could have no conceivable legitimate claim'.[16]

Caliban's revolt is a subplot to Prospero's play, in the sense of the events as he sees them and which he is in control of. Whereas Prospero was unable to forestall his own usurpation from Milan, he

is in control now and can forestall Caliban's action: 'this allows Prospero to annul the memory of his [earlier] failure'.[17] Prospero is a playwright of the events of the island, but in fact the subplot of Caliban's revolt nearly goes beyond his control during the masque that he has suddenly to halt:

> *Enter certain nymphs*
> [IRIS]
> You sunburned sicklemen, of August weary,
> Come hither from the furrow and be merry;
> Make holiday, your rye-straw hats put on,
> And these fresh nymphs encounter every one
> In country footing. *Enter certain reapers, properly habited. They join with the nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the end whereof Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks*
> PROSPERO (*aside*)
> I had forgot that foul conspiracy
> Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
> Against my life. The minute of their plot
> Is almost come. (*To the spirits*) Well done! Avoid; no more!
> *To a strange, hollow, and confused noise, the spirits in the pageant heavily vanish.* [*Ferdinand and Miranda rise*]
> FERDINAND (*to Miranda*)
> This is strange. Your father's in some passion
> That works him strongly.
> MIRANDA Never till this day
> Saw I him touched with anger so distempered.
> (4.1.133–45)

This is a truly dangerous moment at which the 'smooth unfolding of Prospero's plot' is uniquely disturbed, and is accompanied by noise and scurrying off stage.[18] Most significant is the great perturbation visible in Prospero himself, noticed and commented on by Ferdinand and Miranda. This is a moment of potential fracture in the play and it has troubled critics who stress the harmony of the work.

Barker and Hulme read this psychoanalytically as Prospero being suddenly anxious about his dual role as usurper and usurped. The energy needed to hold these two positions together is exposed by

Caliban's attempted usurpation, and at this point the gap between *The Tempest* and Prospero's play (his version of events and the theatrical event he stages for everyone else on the island) is apparent. We see in the former the problems that Prospero suffers in staging the latter. The main plot of *The Tempest* is Prospero's concern over his play's subplot, and the climax of Prospero's play is the (for us, undramatic) revelation of Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess. The climax of *The Tempest*, though, is the above-quoted strange and sudden perturbation of Prospero. Ultimately *The Tempest* is complicit with Prospero's play and treats Caliban's revolt as comic (via Stefano and Trinculo), but this comic closure is itself 'symptomatic of the text's own anxiety about the threat posed to its decorum by its New World materials'.[19] The energy needed to bring about closure shows the play's anxiety about its own function within the 'projects of colonial discourse'. A play, any play, is not simply an instance of the operation of a dominant discursive network, but is a staging of the 'moves and figures' of that discourse. Work needs to be done on drama's precise interaction with dominant discourses, on 'the articulation between discursive performance and mode of representation'.[20]

As can be seen from the above accounts paraphrasing Brown and Barker and Hulme, critics who read *The Tempest* in relation to colonialism tend to bring in rather dense theoretical terms, many of them (such as 'discourse' and 'discursive formations') derived from poststructuralist literary theory, as well as ideas from psychoanalysis. In such readings the political is also the highly theoretical, and it would not be unreasonable to ask whether the jargon has not taken over from good sense when Barker and Hulme refer to 'the text's own anxiety'. At a literal level, a text is not a being so it can have no anxieties, and it is for the reader here to decide for herself whether, as a metaphor, the idea of an anxious text is helpful in understanding the play.

ARIEL AS SUBALTERN

An alternative method of investigation, a retreat from high French theory and a resubmergence into the text itself, is to look beyond

Caliban as the play's sole colonial subordinate (sometimes called a 'subaltern' in postcolonial studies) to see whether other characters in the play fit the colonial model. Ariel might be an obvious contrast to Caliban: flighty where Caliban is earthy, willing where Caliban is grudging, thoughtful and sensitive where Caliban is bodily and crude, and so on. In fact Shakespeare takes considerable pains to make parallels between Ariel and Caliban too, and although Ariel is generally contrasted to Caliban, in key moments they take one another's place. For example, in the second scene Prospero, having sent Ariel off to make himself look like a sea-nymph, calls for Caliban to come forward:

> [PROSPERO] What ho! Slave, Caliban!
> Thou earth, thou, speak!
> CALIBAN (*within*) There's wood enough within.
> PROSPERO
> Come forth, I say! There's other business for thee.
> Come, thou tortoise! When? *Enter Ariel, like a water-nymph*
> Fine apparition! My quaint Ariel,
> Hark in thine ear. *He whispers*
> ARIEL My lord, it shall be done. *Exit*
> PROSPERO
> Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself
> Upon thy wicked dam, come forth! *Enter Caliban*
> (1.2.315–22)

As Peter Holland pointed out, in performance this can be enacted as a surprise: the audience, like Prospero and Miranda, are staring at a point in the theatre (perhaps a stage door) where they expect the concealed Caliban to emerge, having spoken from 'within'. Instead of Caliban, Ariel appears and the surprise is enhanced because he does not seem to have been gone long enough to get into his sea-nymph costume.[21]

Ariel's sea-nymph costume presents a problem of its own. There is no explicit instruction for Ariel to remove this costume, so it is entirely possible that this 'airy spirit' actually looks like something from the ocean for the rest of the play, and as we have seen Caliban too is decidedly fishy. Of course, Ariel may well have put on another

appearance to enact the harpy in 3.3, and he seems also to have taken a part in the disrupted masque for Miranda and Ferdinand, to judge by his comment that when he 'presented Ceres' (4.1.167) he meant to tell Prospero of Caliban's conspiracy. As we saw above, Prospero seems to suddenly remember this conspiracy while watching the masque, but in the 1993 Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Sam Mendes, the actor playing Caliban, David Troughton, took a part as one of the 'certain reapers, properly habited' in the masque. It seemed that perhaps the sight of this somewhat familiar face jogged Prospero's memory, or indeed that perhaps Caliban somehow actually got himself into the masque and was a performer just like Ariel.

Crucially, though, Caliban and Ariel differ in the post-performance future that Prospero's epilogue forces us to consider. Whereas Ariel is freed from service and may, as he has longed to do, fly where he will around the world, Caliban seems simply left behind on the island. For all the talk of the money that could be made by exhibiting him in Europe, nothing is explicitly said about taking him along. Before we turn to Caliban's future, let us look for a moment at the supposed releasing of Ariel:

> ALONSO I long
> To hear the story of your life, which must
> Take the ear strangely.
> PROSPERO I'll deliver all,
> And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales,
> And sail so expeditious that shall catch
> Your royal fleet far off. (*Aside to Ariel*) My Ariel, chick,
> That is thy charge. Then to the elements
> Be free, and fare thou well. *Exit Ariel*
> (5.1.315–22)

Curiously, 'Then to the elements | Be free' is commonly given as the moment of Ariel's enfranchisement, but Prospero has in fact just burdened Ariel with yet another task (a 'charge') to complete first: to create winds to waft Alonso's ship fast enough to catch up with the fleet that left him behind. This sounds like significant work, even for a spirit.

Caliban too is given a task at the end of the play:

> [PROSPERO] (*To Caliban*) Go, sirrah, to my cell.
> Take with you your companions. As you look
> To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.
> CALIBAN
> Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace.
> (5.1.295–9)

This is a kind of promotion for it undoes the banishment out of Prospero's cell that followed from Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. Moreover, Caliban seems genuinely to have learnt a lesson, and wants in future to be dutiful, wiser, and to receive grace. As Holland comments, it is possible to understand Caliban and Ariel as the 'field-nigger and house-nigger of much recent black analysis of structures of colonial power'.[22] This is a contrast between ranks within a subaltern group that the 1960s African American leader Malcolm X used to invoke to explain the phenomenon of some oppressed people identifying more with the concerns and affairs of their masters than with the concerns and affairs of their fellow oppressed.

We may wonder if Prospero thinks that by letting him back into the cell he may turn field-nigger Caliban, who must be kept at a distance and who is implacably antipathetic to Prospero and Miranda's well-being, into house-nigger Caliban who may be trusted at close quarters because his mind has come to accept that his wellbeing is best served by promoting their well-being. We might, from the point of view of rejecting slavery and colonialism as evils to be resisted and exposed wherever we find them (even in the high art of a Shakespeare play), find this a revolting end to Caliban's story. We could however console ourselves that if this interpretation is correct Prospero has at least revised his earlier view that Caliban lacks the human capacity to learn.

We might also console ourselves that Shakespeare seems to have anticipated political theorising about human identities (ethnic, geographic, and linguistic) that not until much later was brought to bear on the vestigial distortions of human society that remain a

consequence of the colonial era. For example, among the latest thinking on the effect of colonisation on human identities there is the 'hybridity' theory of Homi K. Bhabha, expressed in his influential book *The Location of Culture* (1994).[23] Bhabha argues that when Europeans met non-Europeans they not only sought to change them, but were also subtly changed by them, and that rather than think in terms of one culture simply dominating another we should attend to the mutual interactions of culture that generated hybrid forms, without of course forgetting that the one side was always considerably more powerful than the other. The colonist's act of recognising the savage, native 'other' as utterly distinct from himself is always also a misrecognition of himself, and the effort to police the boundary between these opposites is doomed to failure.

Necessarily, according to Bhabha, human beings come together to make hybrid forms. In the light of this, we may reconsider the meeting of Trinculo and Caliban in which the pair of them merge to form one four-legged, four-armed being that Stefano instantly suspects to be one of the 'savages' or 'men of Ind' (2.2.58). In misrecognising his own, his fellow Italian Trinculo, as a foreigner Stefano makes the primal error of the colonial project, and in merging with the foreigner Trinculo enacts the inevitable process of hybridisation. In bringing these concerns into his drama from the early seventeenth century, Shakespeare was remarkably prescient and the play allows us to engage with colonialism as it was understood (by the far-sighted) when the project had barely got off the ground.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- As we have repeatedly found to be the case, when one reads the play it is not clear how human Caliban is supposed to be: only performance 'fixes' this.
- The play subtly anticipates later seventeenth-century debates on learning, cultural difference, and racial difference.
- Overtly postcolonial readings of the play are convincing once we accept certain, contestable, premises that the play seems to hold in unresolved suspension.

- There are simple facts about the story told in *The Tempest* that could be utterly disabling to a postcolonial reading: Caliban is not really a 'native' but the son of exile (Sycorax) who was sent to the island and Prospero is not an empire-builder who sought out the island but a deposed monarch who was washed up there. The competitors for sovereignty over the island are thus both essentially outcasts.
- Without becoming too specific about contemporary analogues (the exploration of the New World, the opening of European trade links with the East), we can say that the play interrogates how Europeans react to meeting non-European strangers and it dramatises patterns and policies of subjugation that were in reality used upon natives.
- It is arguable that Ariel and Caliban are equally subordinated to Prospero even though one seems much freer than the other. How colonialism generates such 'ranks' among the subaltern group has been a key question for postcolonial theory.

NOTES

1. Rudyard Kipling, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Craig Raine (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 127.
2. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, abridged and ed. A. S. Pringle-Pattison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 2.
3. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 2002).
4. Paul Brown, 'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowlege Mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism', in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 48–71.
5. Ibid., p. 48.
6. Ibid., pp. 59–60.
7. Ibid., p. 61.
8. Ibid., p. 62.
9. Ibid., p. 64.

10. Ibid., p. 66.
11. Ibid., pp. 67–8.
12. Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), VIII: Romances: *Cymbeline*; *The Winter's Tale*; *The Tempest*, pp. 275–94.
13. Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 191–205.
14. Ibid., p. 195.
15. Ibid., p. 198.
16. Ibid., pp. 199–200.
17. Ibid., p. 201.
18. Ibid., p. 202.
19. Ibid., p. 203.
20. Ibid., p. 205.
21. Peter Holland, 'The Shapeliness of *The Tempest*', *Essays in Criticism*, 45 (1995), 208–29, 216.
22. Ibid., 208.
23. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

CHAPTER 8

Materialism: *Timon of Athens*

Which matter more, ideas or hard reality? This is the central question of much philosophising since the ancient Greeks. Plato famously took the line that this is a false contrast, for in his view ideas themselves are real. In *The Republic* (*c.* 375 BCE) Plato gave his account of the invisible realm of Ideas or Forms, which realm is beyond our senses, where exist the perfect essences of the things we see around us.[1] Thus, in the world one might meet many different kinds of table, but in the realm of Forms there is the perfect essence of tableness to which the tables of the world only approximate. Whereas an everyday table will become wobbly and cannot be absolutely flat, the one in the realm of Forms has perfect qualities. What seem like the objects of everyday reality around us are, in Plato's view, only poor imitations of the archetypes in the realm of Forms, which are ideal. Because art can only make copies of the everyday – showing, say, how a particular table looks from a certain angle in a certain light – it is a copy of a copy, and hence doubly removed from the real truth of existence, which is in the realm of Forms. This was why Plato banished poets from his republic: like all makers of art (in the widest sense) they deal in the debased, the untrue, and the imitative.

The belief that ideas (Plato's Forms) have a real existence has a long history in the Western intellectual tradition. Idealism, as this is called, was popular with a group of German radical thinkers in the middle of the nineteenth century known as the Young

Hegelians, who included in their number Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner. One of them however, called Karl Marx, started to think that perhaps economics, the hard realities of money and things, was more important than philosophy and ideas. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx explained his move from philosophy to economic matters as a consequence of becoming editor of the journal *Rheinische Zeitung* (1842) in which some practical matters came up for debate.

BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

To satisfy his own interests in these, Marx undertook a critical review of Georg Hegel's philosophy of law and found that law and legal relations, including the forms of the state, are rooted in the material conditions of life. The general, and now much-quoted, conclusion that Marx reached was this:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.[2]

This is a difficult and compressed passage, but the key elements are these:

i) the important relations that people live by are 'independent of their will', meaning that we do not get to choose the ground rules of life, they are given to us;

ii) looking at any one time in history we may speak of the stage of development of the 'material forces of production', and this is the most important determinant of how well one lives: what matters is how good one's society has become at the art of making things, which art improves all the time;
iii) the human relationships involved in the way societies organise the making of things (production) form a foundational 'base' to society and all the ideas in society (its intellectual life, culture, rules of behaviour), called the 'superstructure' are determined by that base;
iv) thus the way we live (especially in our economic interactions) determines how we think, rather than (as is commonly but mistakenly held) the way we think determining the way we live.

Marx had become a materialist, one who believes that the everyday hard realities around us are more important than insubstantial ideas, whether or not Plato was right that these ideas exist as real Forms in an unseen realm. In the preface to *The German Ideology* (1845), co-written with Engels, Marx stated his aim as the exposure of the middle-class preoccupations of the Young Hegelians, especially their valorisation of ideas:

> Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the *idea of gravity* . . . His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful results all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence. This honest fellow was the type of the new revolutionary philosophers in Germany.[3]

The Young Hegelians put ideas before reality and Marx came to see his own philosophical work as likewise flawed in its concern with categories and abstractions rather than life as it is lived, and hence Marx's insistence in his base/superstructure model that reality shapes ideas, that social being shapes consciousness.

TIMON AS UNACCOMMODATED MAN

In Marx's materialist historicism it is not how people and their social relations appear to themselves or others (the superstructure) that shapes social forms and relations, but how they really are related in production (the base). The superstructure 'of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness' cannot exceed the limits set by the base, because people's ideas are 'the direct efflux of their material behavior', are the 'sublimates of their material life-process', so that 'Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life'.[4] Marx distanced himself from the Empiricists such as John Locke who make a collection of dead facts, and from the Idealists, who deal in the imagined activity of imagined subjects, and he put life as it is actually lived at the centre of his historical method. In this method, philosophy loses its status as a separate activity. To make history one must eat, feed, and stay warm, so the first historical act is 'the production of material life itself'.[5]

If there has to be production of some kind for human beings to be alive in the first place, there is no sense in asking the question 'what is a human in its natural state?' This was a question that occupied a number of eighteenth-century thinkers, such as John Locke, whose Empiricism we looked at in the previous chapter, and in the seventeenth century by thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes argued that without what we call a 'social contract' in which people give over to a ruler the power to tell them what to do, individuals would be in a natural state of constant conflict with one another and life would necessarily be 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.[6] That is, long ago human beings formed societies as a trade-off, losing our individual freedoms and gaining security. In *The Social Contract* (1762) Jean-Jacques Rousseau agreed about the trade-off but saw pre-social humankind as rather happier in its freedom than modern humankind, which is prey to all sorts of ills, such as inequality of wealth, that arise from the rules of law.[7] Marx rejected all this: there really was no such thing as pre-social humanity, at least not one that we can talk about as existing within history.

We can read Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* as a thought experiment that anticipates these later concerns of political philosophy. In

self-imposed exile from the city, Timon looks back upon it and imagines its rules of behaviour being overturned to make a state of anarchy, or to use the contemporary word 'confusion':

Enter Timon
TIMON
Let me look back upon thee. O thou wall
That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent!
Obedience fail in children! Slaves and fools,
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
And minister in their steads! To general filths
Convert o' th' instant, green virginity!
Do 't in your parents' eyes. Bankrupts, hold fast!
Rather than render back, out with your knives,
And cut your trusters' throats. Bound servants, steal!
Large-handed robbers your grave masters are,
And pill by law. Maid, to thy master's bed!
Thy mistress is o' th' brothel. Son of sixteen,
Pluck the lined crutch from thy old limping sire;
With it beat out his brains!
(4.1.1–15)

Among the disorders he imagines are social inversions: children cease to obey their parents, slaves take the places of wise old senators, sons beat their fathers to death, and in general the social ranks are transposed. It must be noted that Timon includes a lot of sexual anarchy too: mature women being lustful ('incontinent'), virgins having sex in front of their parents, and maids having sex with their masters. Also, to a much lesser degree, the anarchy is economic: debtors refusing to pay their creditors. It is striking that Timon's problems are essentially economic – he could not pay his debts – but his sense of disorder is primarily about social rank and sexual propriety, not about money.

We are to understand that from his experiences Timon has a sense of society's glue, the social contract, coming unstuck. The distinction between the natural state of humanity and its social state seems to him false, in that within a society that is supposed to be

regulated and secure he now finds that the underlying relationships are exploitative: servants might as well steal because, although no-one mentions it, their masters are 'Large-handed robbers'. Timon decides to seek a state of nature, far from the misery of social being that he, like Rousseau, characterises as a degeneration from natural freedom:

> [TIMON] [*He tears off his clothes*]
> Nothing I'll bear from thee
> But nakedness, thou detestable town;
> Take thou that too, with multiplying bans.
> Timon will to the woods, where he shall find
> Th' unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.
> (4.1.32–6)

Like Martius Coriolanus, who responds to his banishment with 'I banish you' (*Coriolanus*, 3.3.127), Timon makes a virtue of necessity and anticipates a life that is hard but at least free from painful social contacts. Just as we saw in the previous chapter's discussion of colonial discourse, there is here a sharp contrast between 'home' and 'away', but with the misery at home and the peace achieved by leaving it. In fact, we could argue that in *The Tempest* Gonzalo's vision of a natural plantation of the island – 'Had I the plantation of this isle . . . excel the Golden Age' (*The Tempest*, 2.1.149–74) – is a kind of Rousseauean idyll of pre-social life. Timon has no such illusion and only wants to get away from other people. He comforts himself with the thought that the Athenian city wall built to keep the wilderness out also 'girdles in those wolves', his enemies (4.1.2). Curiously, though, Timon in the same breath wishes away the boundary between nature and city: 'O thou wall | . . . dive in the earth, | And fence not Athens!, (4.1.1–3). It is as though he cannot positively convince himself that by exile he can escape Athens, and instead wishes the entire home/away, inside/outside binarism to dissolve in a universal chaos.

Reduced by penury to the epitome of the asocial man, Timon's long scene in the forest outside Athens (4.3) gives the dramatist an opportunity to explore further the theme of humankind's natural state. The 500-line scene is full of imagery of the natural world, and

in particular of the relationships between realms on Earth (the soil, the air, the oceans) and the wider principles operating in the sublunary and superlunary spheres. Forced by hunger into elemental petition, Timon's plea for the Earth to supply him with an edible root is apparently answered by provision of the last thing he needs at this point, exchangeable gold. A Marxist reading of this scene would tend to stress the natural state of human sociability, from which Timon repeatedly fails to escape, but the new, though equally materialist, critical discipline of ecocriticism would attend to just how Earth's bounty is characterised here. Materialism, it should be remembered, is the belief that hard reality (social reality and the reality of the natural world) gives birth to ideas and not the other way round. In the sections that follow, I will be pursuing first a Marxist then an ecocritical reading of the play. Throughout, the emphasis will be on the material world, both natural and social, of which Timon is inevitably a part, despite his attempts to isolate himself.

MONEY, GOLD, AND G(U)ILT: SHAKESPEARIAN ALCHEMY

Marx found in scene 4.3 of *Timon of Athens*, where Timon digs for roots and hits gold, a moment that summed up the peculiar transformatory power of money in human social relations. Marx wrote:

> Shakespeare stresses especially two properties of money:
>
> (1) It is the visible divinity – the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things: impossibilities are soldered together by it.
>
> (2) It is the common whore, the common procurer of people and nations.
>
> [. . .]
>
> That which I am unable to do as a *man*, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of *money*. Money thus turns each of these powers into something which in itself it is not – turns it, that is, into its *contrary*.[8]

Marx was responding to Timon's comments about what gold can do, which begin:

> [TIMON] Thus much of this will make
> Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
> Base noble, old young, coward valiant.
> (4.3.28–30)

Timon goes on at length about the power of gold to alter human relations, but we should not be so quick as Marx is here to associate gold with money, for in his splendid isolation Timon expects to be in no networks of circulation that enable a simple metal to become money. That transformation, metal to money, is inherently a social one.

That gold is not inherently money was Marx's point when in the first volume of *Capital* he discussed 'Exchange':

> The truth of the proposition that, 'although gold and silver are not by Nature money, money is by Nature gold and silver,' is shown by the fitness of the physical properties of these metals for the functions of money. . . . An adequate form of manifestation of value, a fit embodiment of abstract, undifferentiated, and therefore equal human labour, that material alone can be whose every sample exhibits the same uniform qualities. On the other hand, since the difference between the magnitudes of value is purely quantitative, the money-commodity must be susceptible of merely quantitative differences, must therefore be divisible at will, and equally capable of being reunited. Gold and silver possess these properties by Nature.[9]

Marx here tried to explain how gold and silver, albeit mere commodities, came to be universally accepted media for exchange in general. His central point was that gold and silver merely have useful characteristics that enable them to be widely accepted as generalised money: they are relatively hard to win from the earth (and hence the labour congealed in them is densely packed), they are uniform, and they are easily divided and rejoined.

To make this point, Marx oversimplified his argument, for the gold one usually finds in the ground is not uniform and nor is it easily divided and reformed but rather it has to be refined before it has these properties. Gold is difficult to find and Timon might seem just absurdly lucky to happen on a large quantity for so little effort of digging. What kind of gold does Timon find, though? John Jowett surveyed the theatrical preference for it being a hidden hoard of someone's refined gold rather than the unrefined ore,[10] although the text, as Jowett rightly point out, wants to have it both ways. That is, the gold has to be 'Yellow, glittering, precious' (4.3.26) and yet within a minute of stage time the same stuff is 'damned earth' (4.3.42). This ambiguity, Jowett observes, captures the ambiguity of Timon's relation to society: 'he finds himself in the very middle of economic culture at the very point when he was most sure that he had escaped it'.[11] Timon goes on to use the gold he had found as though it were money, and since only refined gold is money, he must have dug up refined gold. And yet, as Jowett remarks, although theatre directors have interpolated scenes of the preceding burying of the gold, the playtext is silent on the matter.

The opening lines of this scene might bear the answer to this problem, and if so the solution is essentially alchemical. Renaissance alchemy had a practical end, the transmutation of cheap metals into gold, but it was underpinned by a complex and subtle model of the universe derived from Aristotle and significantly modified by Paracelsus in the early sixteenth century.[12] The philosophical purpose of turning base metal into gold was to prove a theory about the nature of matter, according to which 'all metals are made from the same basic matter and grow within the crust of the earth like a giant tree or plant'.[13] Gold, in this model, is merely the most refined kind of metal, one that cannot be transmuted further, and hence unalterable even by fire. But it is also a fiery principle in itself:

> In the microcosmic-macrocosmic law of correspondences, gold is the metallic equivalent of the sun, the image of the sun buried in the earth. The sun in turn is the physical equivalent of the eternal spirit which lodges in the heart (the 'sun' of the human microcosm).[14]

The sun's rays, penetrating the earth, were thought to provide 'the generative warmth to ripen such imperfect metals as iron, copper and lead into the perfect metal, gold'.[15] The microcosmic–macrocosmic correspondence mentioned here is part of a supposed cosmological and ideological system shared by all educated Elizabethans that was outlined by E. M. W. Tillyard during World War 2 (see Chapters 2 and 3 above).[16] Although this model is sometimes dismissed as idealism, in fact it is pure, even overstated, materialism: the model assumes that material causes (stellar influence, cosmological interactions) influence everyday events (bad luck, ill-health) that to us seem random or inexplicable.

In the opening lines of the scene, Timon calls upon the sun to do its work of separating elements:

> TIMON
> O blessèd breeding sun, draw from the earth
> Rotten humidity; below thy sister's orb
> Infect the air. Twinned brothers of one womb,
> Whose procreation, residence, and birth
> Scarce is dividant, touch them with several fortunes,
> The greater scorns the lesser.
> (4.3.1–6)

Timon hopes for the evaporation of moisture from the ground to make unhealthy air, but what seems achieved is the transformation of ordinary matter into gold. Timon's first sentence here refers to the sun and moon, but the second is tricky and only after the subjunctive sense of 'touch them' has been grasped does it resolve itself into a call for dissention to be sown between brothers. An easier sense, and one made almost irresistible by the collocation of a 'breeding sun' and its sister (the moon) with 'Twinned brothers' and a 'womb', is that the celestial family of the first sentence is still being elaborated: as with identical twins, so with the heavenly bodies. With this talk of the procreative nature of sun, moon, and earth, it is not surprising that Timon in his alienated and socially-inverted state (outside the walls of home, outside of social circuits) thinks of the earth and its products in terms not of healthy but of debased sexuality: 'damned earth, | Thou common whore of

mankind . . . Thou'rt quick; | But yet I'll bury thee. *He buries gold*' (4.3.43–6).

Timon's unmotivated sexual hostility towards Timandra also speaks of his anxiety about production and reproduction, but a clue about how Timon sees the Earth in all this is his peculiar encouragement to Alcibiades: 'Follow thy drum. | With man's blood paint the ground gules, gules' (4.3.58–9). The word 'gules' is an heraldic term for red, but it was also an eighteenth-century spelling of 'gold' meaning marigold, the gold-flower (*OED* gold²), a form confined apparently to the north of Britain. Even without this link, however, it is not hard to trace how blood and gold were related in Shakespeare's mind, as W. A. Murray shows in relation to the celebrated image of a murdered king: 'His silver skin laced with his golden blood' (*Macbeth*, 2.3.112).[17] Murray demonstrates that ideas about alchemical transformation were made topical by the controversy about the new sixteenth-century medicine of Paracelsus, and argues that the context in *Macbeth* is primarily religious: Duncan's blood is special because he is a saintly king. However, in alchemy blood has strong associations with the principle that metals must 'die' in the original forms to be reborn as gold and with the life-giving red elixir (synonymous with the philosopher's stone) achieved after the white (silver) stage, featured in alchemical treatises with the attendant associations of moon and sun, and of virginity giving way to fecundity.[18]

Of course, the word 'blood' itself is highly polysemous and when King John acknowledges that 'There is no sure foundation set on blood' he immediately glosses his meaning as 'No certain life achieved by others' death' (*King John*, 4.2.104–5) but the opposite meaning is equally active: there is no certainty based on 'lineage, descent' (*OED* blood *n.* 9a). After the inconclusive offstage battle of the English and French between the first two acts of *King John*, the English herald sickeningly describes the once 'silver-bright' armour now 'all gilt with Frenchmen's blood' (2.1.315–16), and we might ask why Shakespeare likens gold-plating to painting in blood. An alchemical explanation is not essential since there is an equally viable alternative in the inescapable 'guilt' of being caught red-handed, that is being caught in the act of murder with the damning evidence, the red blood of one's victim, still on one's hands. Of

course, Macbeth has bloodied hands that literalise the Scottish legal expression meaning 'having the evidences of guilt still upon the person' (*OED* red-handed *a.*, red-hand *a.* and *n.*), which kind of 'guilt' suggested to Shakespeare's associative mind its homophone 'gilt' and hence he put together images of blood-painting and gold-plating. Thus we can explain Lady Macbeth's 'I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, | For it must seem their guilt' (2.2.54–5), although Macbeth's 'His silver skin laced with his golden blood' (2.3.112) does also suggest an alchemical influence in its linking of death, the transformation of silver to gold, and the red elixir.

So, to apply this knowledge about the connotations of blood to *Timon of Athens*, we may say that Timon imagines that the blood let by Alcibiades' soldiers will paint the ground gules because this blood is the source material for a transformative process triggered by the sun and culminating in the production of subterranean gold. The idea of spilt blood productively enhancing the ground might seem strained, but Shakespeare uses it elsewhere, as in Bishop of Carlisle's prophecy that in the coming Wars of the Roses 'The blood of English shall manure the ground' (*Richard*, 2.4.1.128). Such an image of change in the ground suits the play's pivotal scene of change in Timon himself, who links his alteration to the cosmological cycles:

> ALCIBIADES
> How came the noble Timon to this change?
> TIMON
> As the moon does, by wanting light to give.
> But then renew I could not like the moon;
> There were no suns to borrow of.
> (4.3.66–9)

As Scott Cutler Shershow points out, a useful way to understand what is going on in the circuits of exchange in Shakespeare was opened up by the work of French theorists Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida:

> He [Bataille] suggests that the central problem of all material existence is how to expend the surplus energy that flows unceasingly to the Earth from a Sun that 'gives without ever

> receiving'. This literal surplus of energy in the terrestial biosphere cannot, in principle, be fully expended, and so 'can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any *meaning*' (cited in Derrida).[19]

In this view, meaningless loss, the giving away of wealth, is an inevitable condition of existence, and Shershow pointed out that in the Bible and in medieval theology there was always an injunction to thrift and yet also a contradicting exhortation to give things away.[20] However, as we have seen, even in sunlit exile golden wealth pours down on Timon and try as he might he cannot give it away without that act acquiring meaning, not least because such generosity reconnects him with other people.

THE SECOND LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS

Bataille's central claim in *The Accursed Share* (1988–91) is that human beings have always needed to find ways to get rid of excess produce, because the basic processes of the universe and of life produce more energy, and its products in the form of matter, than are needed for existence. This may seem a peculiar claim in a world full of hunger, but taking on average the Earth's receipt of sunlight it is clear that this endless bath of energy is more than enough for everyone's needs. At the level of individual organisms it is clear that the chemical processes driving these are also commonly producing more energy than is needed to maintain life. The most efficient exploiters of the Earth, humankind, have for thousands of years produced abundances that have to be wasted away by religious and cultural pursuits – there is no obvious practical purpose served by the Taj Mahal or the pyramids of Egypt – or by vast orgies of violent destruction such as world wars. Taking the big picture, by which he means seeing all the Earth in its cosmological context, Bataille insists that consumption and waste, not production and conservation, have long been the main problem for economies.

Strictly speaking, even Bataille failed to look at a big-enough picture when considering the entire Earth as the recipient of an endless, free bathing in energy from the sun. What Timon says above

about the moon borrowing light is quite right. Although we cannot credit Shakespeare with a direct appreciation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, Timon's comment should remind us that while the Earth and moon might seem to be recipients of the sun's free gift of light, there is, we now know, a cost to this giving. The local decline in entropy that we enjoy on Earth is at the expense of an increasing entropy at the core of the sun as hydrogen atoms fuse to make helium. Although we like to speak of energy from sunlight as a renewable resource, taking the widest frame of reference it is another version of the hydrogen economy and distinctly irreversible. To a peculiar degree, a number of commonplaces of Renaissance thought, as expressed in Shakespeare's plays and elsewhere, have turned out to be essentially true. The latest science overturns key elements of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought and returns us to the principles that the Enlightenment rejected.[21]

For example, although we habitually reject as folly the alchemical thinking outlined above, it is worth noting that the atomic model of the universe is entirely compatible with the transmutation of elements. Isaac Newton himself was convinced that alchemical transformation was not only possibly but practicable, and his notebooks show that he spent much longer working on alchemy than he did on the mathematics, mechanics, and optics for which he is remembered. On the other hand, Dmitri Mendeleev who compiled the Periodic Table in the nineteenth century was unshakeably convinced that the elements were, as their name implies, immutable so that a material occupying one position in his table could never be altered to occupy another. Work on the natural radioactive decay of elements, by Mendeleev's French contemporaries Henri Becquerel, and Marie and Pierre Curie, led Ernest Rutherford to demonstrate the first artificial disintegration in 1919: collision with an alpha particle turned an atom of nitrogen into an atom of oxygen and an atom of hydrogen. One of the many peculiarities of twentieth-century science – one of the many ways in which it challenges Enlightenment thinking – is that it makes alchemy a perfectly respectable way to think about transmutation.

For all his desire to remain outside circuits of exchange and to remain unchangingly independent, Timon gets hungry. This recurrent human transformation, from satiety to hunger, infuriates

Timon because it requires him to be dependent on the bounty of the Earth:

> TIMON
> That nature, being sick of man's unkindness,
> Should yet be hungry! *He digs the earth* Common mother –
> thou
> Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast
> Teems and feeds all, whose selfsame mettle
> Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puffed
> Engenders the black toad and adder blue,
> The gilded newt and eyeless venomed worm,
> With all th' abhorrèd births below crisp heaven
> Whereon Hyperion's quick'ning fire doth shine –
> Yield him who all thy human sons do hate
> From forth thy plenteous bosom, one poor root.
> (4.3.177–87)

All nature, human and animal, is united in this reliance upon the 'mettle' (for Elizabethans 'metal' was the same word) of the Earth, and to that extent digging up a root is no less an act of dependency than is the digging of gold. One cannot eat gold, as Midas famously learnt, but then not many people can eat nature's bounty in its raw state either. As the thieves point out in response to Timon's claim that 'The bounteous housewife nature on each bush | Lays her full mess before you', they as humans 'cannot live on grass, on berries, water, | As beasts and birds and fishes' (4.3.422–5).

The thieves insist upon the necessity of what we would call the food chain: the lower creatures consume the raw bounty of nature, and the higher creatures consume the lower. Timon objects that actually, as thieves, they position themselves so highly in the chain that they effectively 'eat men' (4.3.427). But their insistence upon the chain gives Timon the idea that the food chain is just one part of a larger, cosmological, chain of being that manifests the same principle of borrowing:

> [TIMON]
> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction

Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun.
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief,
That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
From gen'ral excrement. Each thing's a thief.
The laws, your curb and whip, in their rough power
Has unchecked theft. Love not yourselves. Away,
Rob one another. There's more gold. Cut throats;
All that you meet are thieves.
(4.3.438–48)

If thieving is a universal principle of all human society and of the cosmos, the thief is an honest man because by expropriation he reverses prior theiving. In Marx's terms, the expropriators are expropriated.

Effectively the same dark irony underlies Timon's next social encounter, when his former servant Flavius tries to recover his old position even if he has to reverse the circuit of payment:

FLAVIUS
I beg of you to know me, good my lord,
T' accept my grief, [*He offers his money*] and whilst this poor wealth lasts
To entertain me as your steward still.
(4.3.488–90)

For a moment the flow seems reversed, but still money is, as Marx remarked, a power for transmutation of anything into its contrary: here, the servant seeks to be his own paymaster. We might read this as a distinctly social phenomenon, but we could also see the thrust of the scene as being that human social interaction is but a manifestation of the wider cosmological situation regarding exchange.

Timon does not take his former servant's money, for if he did he would truly be within a circuit of borrowing, which differs from mere 'taking' in that there is an implied obligation to make a later return. This is the notion of reciprocity that Marcel Mauss

explored in his classic book *The Gift* (1954).[22] Mauss pointed out that in many situations the giving of a gift puts the recipient under an obligation to return something of equal value later, and that this is a means by which early societies were bound together. Traces of this reciprocal binding are visible in modern societies – who has not sent a last-minute Christmas card to someone from whom they unexpectedly received one? – and Mauss argued that although this means that giving is always something of a selfish activity, it has the positive effect of forming and maintaining social ties.

Timon starts this scene thinking of the moon's light as a borrowing of the sun's – which itself is closer to the mark than Bataille's notion of the sun gifting its energy – but by the end he has revised this to a principle of thieving because, of course, the moon does not return the energy. Nature, Timon says, is not founded on exchange, upon loans later repaid, but rather energy flow is uni-directional and irreversible. Timon gives an account of the repeated takings in nature: by animals of the sustenance given by plants, by plants of the soil's nutrients, by the soil from the atmosphere, the atmosphere from the ocean, and thence the larger motivating forces of the moon and the sun's operation. What emerges is a sense of cosmic interconnectedness that seen in one light is close to the kinds of official doctrine about a Great Chain of Being that was surveyed by Arthur O. Lovejoy, popularised by E. M. W. Tillyard, and roundly condemned as scholarly wish-fulfilment by New Historicist and Cultural Materialist critics in the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter 2).

THE NEW MATERIALISM VERSUS GAIA

The New Historicism and Cultural Materialism can roughly be dated from the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (1980). Greenblatt repeated the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's apparently Marxist assertion that 'There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture . . .'.[23] In the sense we saw above, one might defend Geertz's statement as meaning that humans cannot exist alone – after all without adult attention an infant quickly dies – so that 'culture' (most broadly

defined as the actions of others) intervenes from the day one is born. But that is not what Geertz meant by culture, and he was making the relativist (that is, anti-essentialist) claim that things we might take for granted as unchangeable aspects of being human (emotions, for example) are historically and culturally contingent.

Marx himself was not anti-essentialist and described as 'species-being' or 'species-nature' the human creative productivity of all kinds that is noticeably lacking in other animals and exists apart from politics and culture.[24] Without such a model of human nature specific political and cultural struggles have no object worth fighting for. Materialists follow Marx in concerning themselves with the hard facts about the world (including economics) rather than the soft ideas, and as Catherine Belsey put it they reject 'the idealist tendency to analyse love and ignore money'.[25] The rejection of idealism might come as a surprise to those unused to philosophical theory: surely Marxism is inherently idealistic? In imagining an ideal form of human society in which no-one has to work more hours than are necessary to produce the value that she wishes to consume, it is idealistic. But in a precise philosophical sense it is not, since it asserts the primacy of material reality over ideas.

Recently, however, there has developed in Shakespeare studies a kind of materialism that implicitly denies the philosophical and political tradition that its name invokes, and insists instead that any analysis concerned with material reality (things, stuff, and not ideas) is materialism.[26] The Marxist critic Hugh Grady objects to this process as essentially a depoliticising of criticism, for rather than focusing on how objects (things) affect subjects (people), all the attention is on objects in their own right. Grady writes:

> The new trend focuses on material objects, their methods of production, their use in daily life, and the array of cultural meanings and practices with which they are associated. In this newer materialism (again speaking generally), cultural and critical theory is largely assumed and undiscussed, and a political relevance to the present is undefined. The idea seems to be that the resolute insistence on materiality, material production, and daily life carries with it its own anti-traditional, anti-idealist values. With this practice becoming widespread in the

> present, the term 'materialist' is increasingly used in reference to this focus on objects and their production, rather than to the philosophical or political tradition of Marxism, feminism, structuralism, and poststructuralism which defined the term in the 80s and early 90s.[27]

In other words, the point of focusing on material reality has always been, from the Marxist view, to go beyond mere matter to show how ideas arise from matter. According to Grady, however, the latest kind of materialism pays no attention to ideas and so could, paradoxically, be said to leave unchallenged the ideas arising from the present state of affairs. For Marxist materialists, ideas are always up for debate precisely because they emerge from material practices, and thus what matters most in *Timon of Athens* is how the protagonist's mind is shaped by the circuits of exchange in the play. A new materialist, on the other hand, would struggle to find much to work on in this play, and would be more at home discussing the circulation of the handkerchief in *Othello* or the reuse of costumes in the theatrical economy of the period.

The Marxist Jean Howard also thinks that an over-fascination with material objects comes at the expense of discussion of ideas. For Howard there is in this work an element of 'materialism' in the pejorative, consumerist sense of shopping:

> As scholars busily examine the properties of books, bodies, houses, clothing, maps, products, and objects, we are experiencing the marked 'thingafication' of the critical scene . . . [A] concern with material things also chimes with the postmodern zeitgeist and the contemporary fascination in many arenas of culture with style, fashion, surfaces, and the objects of consumer culture.[28]

At its best, for example in the work of Natasha Korda, this new materialism – or what Patricia Fumerton calls the 'new new historicism' – offers genuine refinement of Marxist critical and cultural theory using late twentieth-century intellectual developments such as housework theory that illuminate areas of life (especially the domestic domain) to which earlier Marxist thinking was blind.[29]

However, Grady's and Howard's warnings must be heeded, for it would be bizarre indeed if now, at precisely the point in history where not only capitalism but also the economic and environmental crises it engenders become fully globalised, we were to shift our attention from the global back to the local, the everyday, and the 'material' in its weakest common sense of 'mere things'. Rather we should be looking again at such Renaissance concepts as the Great Chain of Being, only under its new name of Gaia.[30] Timon's analysis of how the universe works tells him that it is markedly indifferent to human concerns, and this might alert us to the ecocritical possibilities for characterising nature without falling into anthropocentrism. The natural world's indifference to Timon – the sense that it will go on without him – might be the most positive thing the play has to show to us today.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Idealism and Materialism are precise philosophical terms with meanings quite unlike their non-specialist ones of 'assuming the best about things' and 'acquisitive of goods'.
- In asking questions about how ideas relate to material social practices, Marx was continuing a longstanding tradition of enquiry that began in the sixteenth century.
- In his dramatisation of the ironies of Timon's failed attempts to live asocially, Shakespeare repeatedly reconnects him with circuits of exchange, which Timon eventually realises are fundamental to how the universe is constructed.
- A materialist critical approach starts with how humans produce things (especially and initially food) and works from there to consider how ideas are shaped by these productive processes.
- Some of the central alchemical ideas of Shakespeare's time (such as the principle of transmutation) returned in the twentieth century in the form of atomic physics.
- Principles of cosmic connectedness and transformation discovered in the play make sense when understood in relation to recent ecological and ecocritical work.

NOTES

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Conclusion

This study of Shakespeare's plays started and ended with notions of transformation, from Bottom's unwitting 'translation' into an ass to the alterations of 'Transformed Timon' (*Timon of Athens*, 5.5.19) from benefactor to misanthrope to corpse. Transformation is one of the recurrent principles in the plays, and we have seen it worked through in stories of soldiers turned into lovers, loyal aristocrats turned usurpers (and back again), 'outsider' figures brought into Western cultures that formerly rejected them only to be cast out again, demure young maids turned into husband-seekers and scourges of authority, and ugly old ones turned into supernatural figures, and colonial subordinates turned rebels and turned back again into subordinates. We end with the complex alchemical transformations of money, food, and energy that make *Timon of Athens* a play seemingly concerned at once with life at its most elemental and barbarous and with the beneficent cosmological connectedness of the universe with which ecological theory is concerned.

The primary purpose of this book is to help you understand and write about 'Shakespeare', genre, and critical approaches, including understanding why his name so often has the scare quotes around it. That is to say, to distinguish the works from the biographical construction (the man) is an important first step in this work, and upon that step can be built a distinction between the texts as we have them (unstable and indefinite as they are) and the even more

nebulous but all-pervasive 'Shakespeare' construct that is the plays' critical histories, interpretative potentialities, their high- and low-cultural engagements (in operas and in television advertisements) and, most importantly for our purposes, their multiple uses within education. Education itself is entirely concerned with transformations, not only in producing subjects (persons) equipped to make sense of the modern world, but also in transforming present knowledge into future knowledge. This last transformation is done by literary criticism, which endlessly reinterprets not only the literary texts themselves but also reinterprets past criticism to see what it says of its age.

According to Terence Hawkes, each age reinterprets Shakespeare for itself, producing new meanings that did not, could not, hitherto exist. Thus for us in the early twenty-first century there is no way to read *The Merchant of Venice* without thinking about where European anti-semitism led in the early 1940s, or to think about *Othello* and *The Tempest* without bringing in the enslavement and the transatlantic transportation of Africans, and the wider European colonial projects, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, because each age necessarily has to read, perform, and criticise Shakespeare in the light of its own concerns, Shakespeare is effectively the canvas on which each age projects what matters most to itself. Hence Hawkes's famous formulation that 'Shakespeare doesn't mean, *we* mean *by* Shakespeare'.[1]

You might want to reject Hawkes's assertion and instead pursue the project of historical recovery in the hope of actually finding Shakespeare's original meanings. In making this choice, the key process will be working out just what you want to read, study, and criticise Shakespeare for. You may believe that there are original meanings still latent in the texts and available for us to return to, and thus the work of making sense of Shakespeare is done in order to respect and recover that originating intention. This need not entail falling into the trap of what is called the 'intentional fallacy', the error of chasing the intentions of long-dead authors when in fact all that remains to us – all that we can know – are the words of the surviving texts.[2] If we think about Shakespeare as an active worker in the early-modern theatre, a practical man whose labours had a

definable goal – the putting on of successful plays – then we might argue that recovering the detail of this labour of a play-wright (a maker of plays) is no different from recovering from the evidence of an archaeological dig the labour of a wheel-wright or of a cart-wright.

On the other hand, if we accept Hawkes's formulation, we are effectively saying that there is no such recovery of meanings that does not already have in sight an object other than mere recovery, or to use a popular phrase, that every critic 'has an axe to grind'. This way of thinking has the democratic merit of giving us an equal claim to Shakespeare: we are all grinding our various axes on the same stone, and what matters is not the stone (the plays) but the axe (what we do with them). As has been reiterated in this book, the act of putting on a play is very much like the act of criticising a play, in that in each case one selects from among the script's plenitude of meanings the one that one wishes to privilege for now, in this production or in this essay. This means that your critical engagements – your readings, your essays, your productions – have a provisional validity equivalent to mine, to any critic's, or to any director's.

This sense of equality is empowering, but it does not mean that anything goes, that all interpretations are equally valid. Rather, it means that anyone is entitled to enter the critical debate, to put forward an argument, and to engage with others' responses to it. All such engagements are necessarily provisional, and over time some will cease to be spoken of and others will strike readers as being worth repeating and answering. The author hopes that this book has enabled you to enter into such engagements for yourself with a sense that, although you cannot know everything about Shakespeare, you can use what you know and what you personally think about the works to make critical assertions based on evidence, wielding rhetorical devices, and aiming to further a particular argument. The exciting part is what happens next: seeing how others repond to your arguments, seeing for yourself if you agree or disagree with their responses, and revising your own positions accordingly. All who do that can claim to be critics.

NOTES

1. Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.
2. W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946), 468–88.

Student Resources

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES AND REFERENCE SOURCES

All of Shakespeare's works can easily be located on the internet, but mostly one finds texts based on nineteenth-century editions that are markedly old-fashioned. This is no minor point: the differences between reading a play and seeing that play performed have been a central concern of this book, and nineteenth-century editions tended to invent matter – such as indications of location, for example in *Hamlet* 'Scene: The battlements of Elsinore castle' – to help the reader imagine the world in which the play was set. Here we have stressed that when reading one should imagine not the fictional location but the early-modern theatrical context for which the plays were written, which means essentially thinking of male actors performing in an open-air playhouse on a summer's afternoon. Using old-fashioned texts of Shakespeare is likely to mislead on this crucial point.

Fortunately, there are now a growing number of modern, scholarly editions of Shakespeare available for free on the internet. For those who wish to explore the origins of these texts, there are also complete facsimile editions of all the early printings of Shakespeare, the quarto and Folio texts discussed in the introduction. The situation is more patchy regarding secondary material: there are a couple of peer-reviewed journals that are freely distributed on the internet, but most of the material is locked away in subscription-only sites

such as Literature Online. Most British university students can access these resources via their institutional libraries.

Electronic texts

Internet Shakespeare Editions (ISE)

http://ise.uvic.ca
This extraordinary free site provides newly-created modern-spelling critical editions of Shakespeare produced to the highest scholarly standards. At the time of writing five of the works of Shakespeare are available here as full editions and the rest are in progress. The site also offers searchable electronic texts of the early quartos and Folio, and high-quality facsimiles images of these books so that you can see just how Shakespeare's works appeared to their first readers. There are also reliable biographies of Shakespeare on this site, and essays about the theatre.

Literature Online (LION)

http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk
This subscription-only service provides searchable electronic texts of all English literature (poems, plays, and prose narratives) up to the twentieth century. (What counts as 'literature' is, of course, a debatable point, and there are books that are often studied as literature that are absent from this selection.) For Shakespeare, the LION texts are drawn primarily from the Folio of 1623 and are better viewed at the ISE site listed above. However, with LION you can easily find the texts of plays by Shakespeare's predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, and so compare his work with theirs.

Early English Books Online (EEBO)

http://eebo.chadwyck.com
EEBO is a subscription service that contains digital images of virtually all the books (literary and non-literary) published in England from the invention of printing in the late fifteenth century to 1700,

around 125,000 volumes in all. With the extra-cost feature called the Text Creation Partnership (TCP), about 15% of these books are also available in full-text searchable electronic text. Having EEBO-TCP is like having a specialised research library of early-modern books at your disposal, and in general you will find that any pre-1700 book you might want to read is in there. Thus, you may for example use EEBO-TCP to read the prose chronicles of Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed that were discussed in Chapter 2 as the chief sources for Shakespeare's history plays.

Secondary materials

Early Modern Literary Studies (EMLS)

http://purl.oclc.org/emls
This was the first freely-available peer-reviewed scholarly journal to appear on the internet and it is now in its fourteenth year. Although it ranges across all literature of the early-modern period, its backlist contains many valuable articles on Shakespeare. It must be remembered, however, that this is a forum for research-level scholarly exchange, so the material is not written with the general reader in mind.

Renaissance Forum

http://www.hull.ac.uk/renforum/
The second freely-available peer-reviewed scholarly journal to appear on the internet, and in all respects much like EMLS.

Borrowers and Lender: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation

http://www.borrowers.uga.edu
This journal is specifically concerned with modern uses of Shakespeare rather than Shakespeare in his own time. This has special issues on such topics as Shakespeare for Children, Canadian Shakespeares, Shakespeare and Opera, and Shakespeare on Film.

The Modern Language Association International Bibliography (MLA-IB)

The MLA-IB is the main tool for finding secondary reading in literary studies. In general books are easy to find using the Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) of the major libraries, or indeed for books in print the search engine of new and used booksellers such as Amazon (www.amazon.com) and Abebooks (www.abebooks.com). MLA-IB, however, focuses on what OPACs do not catalogue, which is the content of each issue of a journal that appears, or each essay in a book-form collection of essays. Whereas an OPAC will tell you that a particular library takes the journal *Shakespeare Quarterly* or has purchased the collection of essays called *Alternative Shakespeares*, only a subscription-based indexing service such as MLA-IB will tell you in detail what each article in each issue of the journal, or each essay in the book of essays, is about. There are multiple ways to get the MLA-IB data, but it is commonly received as part of the LION package described above. Once you have found the article you want using MLA-IB, you must either find a library that subscribes to the journal in which it appears and that has the particular issue in which it appeared, or which bought the book of essays concerned, or you must seek an online version of the text. LION itself contains the full-texts of around 130 journals (and rising by the year), and there are other online republishers of journal articles such as JSTOR (for backfiles of journals) and Project Muse (for current and recent issues), and specialist products from digital publishers such as Thomson Gale, EBSCO, and ProQuest. For information on which of these you have access to, you should contact your institutional library.

The World Shakespeare Bibliography (WSB)

http://www.worldshakesbib.org/

This subscription-only database provides essentially the same service as the MLA-IB, but confines itself solely to Shakespeare and aims to be more comprehensive in the sense of missing fewer of the obscure or hard-to-obtain items. Originally part of the journal *Shakespeare Quarterly*, WSB is not only adding new records

each year as fresh material is published but also is reaching into the history of publishing on Shakespeare, decade by decade, so that when it is complete it will be the first place one should look for information about what has been published on the subject of Shakespeare.

GLOSSARY

Blackfriars

An indoor theatre in an elite district in the heart of the city of London. It was used between 1576 and 1584 and again between 1600 and 1608 by companies of boy actors, and after 1608 by Shakespeare's company, the King's men, who played there in the winter and at the open-air Globe theatre in the summer. The company had wanted to use the Blackfriars from 1597, when the lease on their playhouse The Theatre in Shoreditch expired, but they were prevented by a complaint to the Privy Council that this would disturb the peace of the rich local residents.

Blank Verse

Unrhymed ten-syllable iambic pentameter poetry, as used by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* (*c.*1390) and by John Milton in his *Paradise Lost* (1655–8). The form was not much used for drama until Christopher Marlowe popularised it.

Burbage, James

The father of the actor Richard Burbage – the leading actor of Shakespeare's company – and the builder and manager of the first open-air amphitheatre playhouse, The Theatre in Shoreditch. A founding member of the Leicester's men's company, Burbage established a theatrical dynasty that rivalled Philip Henslowe's (see below), the two of them dominating London theatre.

Chamberlain's men

Shakespeare's company of actors, of which he was a founder member, formed in 1594. After 1603 they received royal patronage and hence were known as the King's men.

Children's Companies

Between 1576 and 1584 companies of boy actors performed at the Blackfriars theatre, and between 1575 and 1590 another such company performed at a theatre in the precinct of St Paul's church.

Contextualise

To put something, usually a literary work, in its context. Generally this is an historical context, but there are others contexts such as a pattern of a writer's reading and her responses to previous writers.

Deconstruction

An approach to literature (and arguably, life itself) popularised by the philosopher Jacques Derrida and characterised by an interest in self-contradiction, indeterminacy, and formal (especially linguistic) characteristics and a relative uninterest in history and politics. Deconstruction's adherents think of it as not so much a school of literary criticism as an attitude towards thinking in general, and they are sceptical of traditional categorisations of knowledge and traditional hierarchies based on structural contrasts such as high-brow and low-brow culture. The term is loosely equivalent to poststructuralism.

Duopoly

In 1594 the Privy Council limited London playing to two companies, the Admiral's men at The Rose and the Chamberlain's men at The Theatre. Before this, companies tended to move between the suburban playhouses in the summer and into the city inns in the winter. The settlement of 1594 kept them out of the inns but allowed the two favoured companies to have a kind of monopoly-of-two (hence

'duopoly') of the London theatrical market, and both did very well out of it. Audiences could for the first time anticipate where they had to go to see the next Marlowe or Shakespeare play performed. As repeat audiences grew, there also arose a star system around the actors Richard Burbage (for Shakespeare's Chamberlain's men) and Edward Alleyn (for the rival Admiral's men).

Folio

An expensive, large format of book publishing in which a single sheet (printed on both sides) is folded in half to make two leaves, and multiple such two-leaf sheets are brought together (each held within the next) to make a gathering. Commonly, three such sheets were used, producing a gathering of six leaves (thus 'folio-in-sixes') and hence twelve pages. Ben Jonson's plays were printed in this impressive format in 1616, and in 1623 Shakespeare's former fellow actors (he being seven years dead) put together the first complete works of his plays, the so-called First Folio.

Globe Theatre

In 1599 Shakespeare's company dismantled their old home, The Theatre in Shoreditch, and reassembled it on a new site on the southern shore of the river, next to Henslowe's Rose. They did this because the owner of the land on which The Theatre was built would not negotiate a renewal of the ground-lease, and because the Burbage family had sunk all their money in the abortive Blackfriars project that had come to naught.

Great Chain of Being

A model of the universe in which the largest cosmological structures are thought to be ordered in the same patterns as the smaller, local earthly structures (especially in respect of hierarchical ranks), and in the structures of the human body and socio-political order. The idea was expounded by Arthur O. Lovejoy and E. M. W. Tillyard in the early twentieth century, the latter especially being responsible for the popularisation of the view that Elizabethans believed in the

Great Chain. Criticised at the time for being overly simplistic and for overstating the Elizabethans' conformity of mind, Tillyard was subject to a repeat attack in the 1980s from the British left-wing Cultural Materialist critics.

Henslowe, Philip

Builder of The Rose, Fortune, and Hope playhouses and father-in-law to Edward Alleyn, the leading actor of the Admiral's men who were the chief rivals to Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's men. Henslowe's daily account book has survived and is our chief source of information on how the early-modern theatre operated.

Historicise

To put something, especially a literary work, in its historical context. This is generally done in the conviction that the historical context will shed light on the text, and historicists (as those who do this are called) are by nature apt to see literary work and the wider social life in which it emerged as intimately connected. By contrast, critics of the Formalist schools (including New Criticism and Deconstruction) tend to see the literary work as somewhat or totally independent of its historical context, and to be best understood on its own terms as a complex and carefully constructed artefact obeying its own internal rules and logic.

Idealism

The belief that ideas have a real existence, and thus that abstractions and principles are what philosophy should concern itself with rather than attending to mere matter.

Marlowe, Christopher

The most successful star writer of plays before Shakespeare and probably his greatest influence. Marlowe popularised the blank verse iambic pentameter form for drama.

Materialism

The belief that matter (stuff, hard reality) is all that exists and all that philosophy should concern itself with, and that ideas have no reality other than as arrangements of matter. Materialism is the opposite of idealism.

Postcolonialism

An approach to literature and a genre of literary writing, both concerned with victims of colonial appropriation of overseas territories, especially that undertaken by the European powers against America in the early-modern period and against Africa in the nineteenth century. Early postcolonial theory and practice tended to represent and promote, as an alternative to the coloniser's view of the world, the experiences and suppressed cultures of the colonised. More recent postcolonial work finds its concerns within texts that are not obviously about colonialism at all – often arguing that the relevance has itself been disguised as part of the colonial process – and attends as much to the effect of colonialism upon the coloniser as the effect on the colonised.

Privy Council

A collection of senior aristocrats who met to advise the monarch on matters of public and state policy. Although the monarch was not bound by their decisions, the advice of council was in this period generally taken seriously as the primary source of expertise available.

Problem plays

A term applied to Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*, and sometimes also *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*, to designate the awkwardness that readers and playgoers find in their responses to these works. The plays challenge conventional notions of how drama should proceed, violating the usual expectations arising from conventions of genre and dealing with the topic of human sexuality with surprising frankness.

Providence

The idea that God is taking an interest in, and shaping, human events. Early-modern drama stages conflicts over whether what happens to characters is directed solely by human actions or whether providence takes a hand too.

Quarto

A cheap, small format of book publishing in which a single sheet of paper (printed on both sides) is folded twice to make a gathering of four leaves (hence 'quarto') and thus eight pages. Around ten such gatherings were needed to make a printed book containing one play. Half of Shakespeare's plays were printed in his lifetime in the quarto format.

Queen's men

An elite company of players formed in 1583 by leading privy councillors by taking the best actors in all the companies. They were sent to tour the country promoting Elizabeth's governance and English cultural cohesion.

Repertory

The selection of plays that an acting company was performing at any time, one-per-day in rotation. The evidence of Henslowe's Diary shows that a new play (or an old one revived) would enter a company's repertory about every two weeks and would play several times in short succession (but not on consecutive days). After the first few performances, the intervals between the play's performances were gradually extended from a few days to a couple of weeks and then it dropped out of the cycle entirely. The time taken to drop out of the repertory (that is, the rate at which the intervals between performances were widened) was dependent on how popular the play was with audiences, judged by the income it generated.

Romances

A set of plays written towards the end of Shakespeare's career, comprising *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest* that share these features: highly improbable plot, travel over great distances (usually by sea) with its attendant dangers, the sundering and reuniting of families, and a narrative gap of about fifteen years in which a daughter grows from infancy to sexual maturity. Some critics see this categorisation as too rigid and prefer the term Late Plays, and others refuse to see any pattern at all in these works.

Swan Theatre

An open-air amphitheatre playhouse built on Bankside (upstream from Henslowe's Rose) by Francis Langley in 1595. It is the only open-air amphitheatre for which there survives a picture of the interior: Johannes de Witt's drawing reproduced on page 16. Virtually all that we know about the insides of open-air playhouses of this period comes from this drawing, and we assume that The Globe shared essentially the same appearance.

Tetralogy

A sequence of four plays on one topic. Shakespeare wrote two historical tetralogies: i) *1*, *2*, *3 Henry 6* and *Richard 3* in the early 1590s, and ii) *Richard 2*, *1*, *2 Henry 4*, and *Henry 5* in the late 1590s.

Tudor myth

A narrative about the origins of Elizabeth 1's ruling dynasty, founded by her grandfather Henry 7. In the Tudor myth, this family united the warring factions of the houses of York and Lancaster, thus ending the Wars of the Roses and bringing lasting peace to England. Critics such as E. M. W. Tillyard saw the articulation of the Tudor myth as the overarching purpose and meaning of Shakespeare's English history plays.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Rather than a list of all works cited, this is a guide to key secondary reading for each play. However, the following are useful for all the plays.

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For most of the plays, the *Casebooks* and *New Casebooks* series from Palgrave Macmillan offer a selection of key critical essays in one convenient volume.

Chapter 1 Comedies

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Honigmann, E. A. J., *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response*. New edition with additional chapters on *Henry V* and *As You Like It* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

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